



# **The Friend of a Friend**

GoldenEmpire

## The Thing to Ruin His Day



“No.”

James Potter blinked his hazel eyes behind his glasses in utter and absolute shock. The cold wind swirling through the air swept over his face, carrying the faint smell of the Black Lake with it, and James was speechless for a second. Thankfully he recovered quickly and his nonchalant, charming, rugged smirk slid back onto his lips.

“I don’t think I heard you right, Evans,” he cocked his head to the side, “So I’m going to ask again. Will you come with me to the New Year’s ball?”

Lily Evans, caught somewhere between annoyance and amusement, crossed her arms over her chest and looked at James with her beautiful green eyes, unwavering, “I said no, Potter. Do you need me to spell it out?”

“Alright, Evans. I see how it is,” James’ smirk widened as he caged Lily in against one of the willows framing the lake, placing his hand on the rough bark above her fiery hair, “You’re playing hard to get?”

They were in seventh year, and at this point it was pretty clear that the two of them were an item. James had asked Lily out multiple times only to be loudly and publicly turned down. It didn’t faze him though because he knew the girl fancied him – the stolen kisses in the crevices of Hogwarts or after they got drunk in the Hufflepuff common room told him as much. So to him this was just another thing he’d have to work for with Lily.

“No, Potter,” Lily lightly pushed away at James’ chest, “I’m serious. I’m not going with you to the Christmas ball,” there was something in her voice that made it clear she wasn’t messing about.

“Why not?” James asked, annoyed now, stepping back. Lily sighed.

“Listen, James,” she said softly, sweetly, and the fact that she used his first name made James smile and melt a little, “I would go to the ball with you, it’s could be our last one together at school,” she looked at the ground and a light blush dusted her cheeks, “But I’m not going to, because although you’ve definitely changed over the last few years, you still treat Sev like garbage.”

James felt straight anger hit him at the mention of the other boy’s name and he turned around in a frustrated circle, groaning, “Why did you have to go and make up with that Slimy git?” he complained.

“Potter,” Lily snapped, “He’s my friend.”

"He called you a mudblood," James retaliated, "he deserves to rot in the ground like the worm he is."

"See! This is what I mean!" Lily exclaimed, "He's my best friend and I forgave him and it's not your place to judge him," before James could argue with her flawed logic she held up her hand, "Point of the matter is that I can't stand the way you treat him, and things between me and you will never change, never grow, if you continue that way."

"Fine," James gritted, "I'll be civil. Just come to the New Year's Ball with me."

"I will," Lily said calmly, and continued before James could get excited, "*but* you have to do one thing for me," she smiled when she saw James' puzzled look, "There are over two months until the New Year's ball. In those two months I want you to be more than civil with Severus. I want you to *befriend* him-"

"Oh no-" James started, but Lily's glare made him shut up.

"I want you to befriend him – take him to Hogsmeade with you and the boys, hang out, copy each other's homework, do what normal friends do."

"But...*why*?" James asked, pouting like a puppy. Lily sighed again. She sighed around James a lot lately.

"Because he's going to be in my life, in *our* lives if what you say you feel for me is real," the girl exclaimed, "He's a crucial part to me, he's important, and I can't be with you if you hate him." James didn't say anything, because he didn't know *what* to say. He hated that prick. Lily stepped forward and took his hands, smiling sweetly, "Just give him a chance. He's a good guy, James. A chance is all I ask."

The boy exhaled, but Lily's smile was too beautiful to resist, "Alright," he said dejectedly, "I'll *try*."

Lily's smile blossomed, "Perfect. You also have to take him home for Christmas."

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"I love Lily, I really do," Sirius said, sitting cross-legged on Remus' bed and looking sombre, something that rarely happened, "But no girl is worth that sacrifice. Not even her."

"Shut up, Padfoot," James said, stretched out on his Quidditch blankets and looking at the canopy of his bed miserably, "This isn't funny."

"I kind of agree with Prongs," Remus admitted from his place by the fireplace, where he was flicking through a heavy tome about medical potions. He had shot up during the summer and now seemed confused about what to do with his new lanky form. He didn't look up from the paper as he spoke, "We've pestered the boy for years now. It's getting kind of old, isn't it?"

Sirius snorted humourlessly, "What do you mean? It's my only joy in life."

"I'm with James and Remus on this one," Peter said anxiously. He was also sitting on the floor, picking at a loose thread of the carpet with his chubby fingers, "I don't want to bully Snape anymore."

"Well that's just brilliant," Sirius said sarcastically, "Cheers, Wormtail."

"We don't have to pick on him, I don't care," James whined, "But *friends*? With that wanker?"

"Peter you're ruining the carpet," Remus said absently and Peter quickly stopped pulling at the thread, squeaking out a *sorry*.

"I reckon now is the time you really realise if you love Lily then, isn't it," Sirius sighed dramatically, giving up the fight, "if you're ready to be best buds with Snivellus over her then it's fucking true love, mate."

"Of course it's true love," James smirked, "Have you *seen* the girl? She looks like a goddess."

"Mhmm, yeah," Sirius nodded, mimicking his best friend's smirk. Remus rolled his eyes and stood up.

"You guys are so gross sometimes," he shook his head and headed for his bed.

"Shut up Moony," Sirius said good-heartedly.

"Alright, but what should I do?" James asked impatiently, "How do I even go about befriending the git?"

Sirius stared at him with wide eyes for a second, as did Peter. The latter spoke after a few seconds, "Wow. You're really going to do this aren't you?"

"I don't have a choice. Lily made it clear that we will never be more than what we are now if I hate her best friend," James said bitterly. Sirius sat up and reached over to pat his friend on the shoulder.

"We're doing that Halloween thing. Why don't you invite him to that?"

James puffed out his cheeks in thought, "It's a start."

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Severus was sitting in the library, about two dozen stuffy old books opened in front of him on the table. He was scribbling down an essay for Professor Slughorn out of his own free will. He knew the teacher didn't like him and wouldn't care about the essay anyway, but honestly Severus had nothing better to do. It was kind of depressing. The seventeen year old mournfully looked out of the gothic window next to the table, but all he could see outside was darkness and rain streaking the glass. There was a cobweb in the corner.

It was a Saturday night, and most of the Seventh years were either sneaking into each other's dormrooms to fuck or have grimy little drink ups, or they crept out of the castle and made their way to Hogsmeade, to one of the many pubs and clubs. Not Severus, his nights looked the same no matter what day of the week it was. He had no friends after all, nowhere to be.

Except that wasn't true. Lily was his friend. Ever since she had forgiven him Severus was ecstatic and his life changed for the better, if only slightly. He didn't think he loved the girl, not anymore, but she was dear to his heart and he would do anything for her. Her sudden love and affection that Severus lacked in his life even made the boy pause and consider his slow but steady involvement with the Death Eaters and The One Who Shall Not Be Named. Severus was almost one of them, and he was meant to take the Dark Mark in the summer. But that would mean losing Lily again, and Sev didn't know if he was ready for that when he had just gotten her back.

He was lost in thought, his work completely forgotten, and he stared out of the window. His



moment of peace was interrupted when a person suddenly slid into the free chair opposite him. Severus was surprised, because nobody ever sat with him except Lily, and when he actually looked at the person he was nothing short of shocked.

"Potter," he hissed, immediately closing in on himself and pulling up his protective walls. The sight of the boy opposite him, so perfectly handsome and perfectly devilish, made Severus sick. He hated the boy, hated him, hated him, hated him. His body physically hurt at the sight of him, stomach burning with fury, skin tingling at the memory of the bruises that the Gryffindor had inflicted on him through the years.

"Hello Sniv-," James paused, clenched his jaw, and smirked again, "Hello *Snape*."

"What do you want?" the Slytherin barked, calculating in his head how long it would take him to collect his things and go. Too long. It was smarter to hold down his fort for now.

"I want to talk is that so bad?" Potter asked with an eye-roll.

"Yes, I don't know what you and your dickhead friends are planning--"

"Relax," Potter said coldly, "We're not planning anything. In fact, I'm here alone."

"So was I before you decided to ruin my night," Severus snapped, anxiously looking between the surrounding bookshelves for any sign of the other three.

"Oh please, your night was already ruined," Potter looked around the dim library with distaste, "What a miserable Saturday night."

"Can you fucking get on with it?" Sev demanded, feeling his skin prickle with anger. He wanted to throw himself across the table and choke the goddamn Gryffindor to death, but then he would probably return and haunt Severus for the rest of his days.

"Look," Potter looked at him tiredly, "We both care about Lily. I want us to put our differences aside for her."

Severus' eyes narrowed and doubt entered his heart, "A truce? From you? What kind of shit joke is this?"

"I'm serious," Potter wasn't smirking that infatuating smile anymore, "I don't want to fight with you anymore."

"Superb. Bloody fantastic," Sev just wanted him to go. Nobody made him feel quite as nervous as Potter, and the Slytherin had been surrounded by Death eaters before, "We're not fighting anymore, can you go now?"

Potter exhaled, "No. I actually came here to ask you to come to the Halloween drink up we're having in the Ravenclaw common room next week."

"What?" Severus blinked, completely caught off guard, some of his anger disappearing to be replaced by confusion.

"Do you need me to spell it out?" James rolled his eyes behind his glasses, "I'm inviting you to come to a party."

"So you can make fun of me?" Severus snorted, "Sure. What is it going to be this time? The pant pulling thing's old by now, so it's going to have to be something more humiliating. Whatever it is

I'm not going for it."

"Listen you prick-," James started angrily, something unusual for him because he never got heated with Severus, "Listen," he repeated, more calm now, "There's no hidden agenda. I genuinely want to put the past in the past and get on with Lily. You're her best friend so I want to get on with you too," he stood up and looked at Severus, and something about the tiredness in his eyes made the Slytherin question if this was a prank after all, "Anyway, you're invited. Starts at eight. The password's orange juice. Come or don't."

Then he got up and walked between the bookshelves, but before he disappeared he paused and looked at the still-stunned Severus. A cruel, mocking smirk appeared on his face, something much more normal for him, "Oh, and don't worry. You don't need a costume. You're a freak anyway."

## Reasons Not to Go



Severus had hesitated in front of the door leading to the Ravenclaw Tower for too long now. He had stood outside in the chilly corridor for several minutes and he was sure that any moment someone would come and ask him what he was doing here. Severus swallowed nervously. He had been anxious all day, contemplating whether he should accept Potter's invitation to the Halloween party or not. The Gryffindor hadn't attempted to speak to him for the past week so the Slytherin honestly didn't know if he even remembered inviting him, but when he found out that some of his fellow Slytherins were going to this party, he broke. It was curiosity more than anything that brought him here.

Severus, at first, had tried to clean up for the occasion. He put on his least tattered black robe and pulled his greasy hair into a knot at the nape of his neck, but with disgust he realised that his least tattered robe was still tattered, and that his hair still looked bad, and that he was still ugly, so he changed back and grumpily stalked towards the West Wing, pretending like he didn't care. It was silent now, in the corridor, and Severus wondered if maybe this was a prank, that maybe he'd open the door and there'd be no party, just people laughing and mocking him for thinking he would ever get invited. That thought made him sick. He was stupid for coming here.

"Sev!" a voice sounded suddenly, elated and full of joy. Severus turned around and couldn't help but feel relief and happiness when he saw Lily approaching, grinning from ear to ear. Potter trailed behind her, looking none too pleased, hands shoved into the pockets of his expensive robes. The fiery haired girl threw her arms around Severus with a wild giggle, "You came!"

"So it was your idea?" the Slytherin asked, hugging his friend back. He craved the hugs he got from her for they were the only affection ever bestowed upon him.

"No," Lily stepped back, "It was James'. He wants to start over, don't you James?"

By then Potter had come to stand next to them. He offered Severus a wiry smile, "Sure," he said, but sounded uncertain himself. Severus looked away when Lily took the Gryffindor's hand. He wasn't jealous, not anymore, but seeing the two of them together still made him ache for what they had. Maybe that's why he had fought for Lily for so long, because he didn't want to be left behind. How selfish of him.

"Shall we?" Potter asked awkwardly, pointing at the eagle shaped knocker on the powerful door. Severus shrugged vaguely, shoving his hands into his pockets to mimic Potter's earlier position.

"You know Adrian and Florence hijacked the doorknob so for tonight it won't be asking any riddles, and has just has a normal password?" Lily asked cheerfully, clearly happy that her almost-boyfriend and best friend were kind of getting along. Both the boys let out muttered, unenthusiastic agreements that the girl paid no attention to as she said, "Orange juice."

The door swung open and immediately loud music filled the corridor. Severus was shocked

because suddenly there was darkness and bright, swirling lights piercing it, and shouting and laughter and dancing-

"Get in! Hurry up!" Bertram Aubrey was standing by the door with a cup of blood-red punch in his hand, ushering the trio in. He looked surprised to see Severus but didn't really say anything, quickly shoving the door shut behind them in order to keep the party a secret from the professors. He was clearly on door duty and didn't look too pleased about it.

The Ravenclaw common room was stuffy and hot and smelled like sweat and alcohol. Pumpkins ringed the ceiling, their facial expressions changing every few seconds. Green fog snaked between the legs of the dancers who took up the majority of the floor, writhing to the obnoxiously loud music, the only light coming from the pumpkins and the disco-ball overhead. The furniture had been shoved to the walls, and was now littered with snacks stolen from the house elves in the kitchen. It was an organized sort of chaos and Severus felt horribly out of place.

Lily and James disappeared into the group of dancers almost immediately, abandoning the Slytherin and Severus confined himself to the shadows ringing the room, because that's where he felt best. It was a little late in the party and so people were already drunk off Firewhiskey undoubtedly smuggled into the castle by Potter and his gang. With distaste Severus stepped over a couple snogging messily on an armchair and found himself next to the punch table. Sev didn't drink so he just stood there awkwardly and watched the dance floor. Pettigrew, Lupin and Black had found Lily and Potter and now they all danced in a slightly-clumsy and quite-tipsy group. Pettigrew moved like the rat he was, flailing, nervous and uncoordinated. To avoid looking like him Severus steered clear of any dancing. Lupin just kind of bounced to the music, an arm slung over someone's shoulder at all times. Lily spun and sang along happily to whatever song was playing. Black was more graceful in his dancing, but overtly sexual in Severus' opinion. The Slytherin's eyes landed, almost on accident, on James.

He was probably the second best dancer to Black, moving naturally to the music and spinning a joyous Lily in his arms. *They look good together*, Sev thought bitterly, though he didn't know why he was bitter. The Slytherin, out of lack of anything better to do, started counting all the differences between him and James. They were virtual opposites – the most handsome boy in the school, and the ugliest one. They both had black hair, but Severus' was always greasy because he had learnt long ago to stop trying, and also because when his hair was washed it would always go wavy and he hated that. Potter clearly didn't have that problem – his locks were always lustrous and perfectly tousled, as if he had just rolled out of bed. It suited him. He and Severus used to be the same height which helped when they fought, but the past year Potter had shot up and now towered over Severus like a castle. He also got broader, and more muscular, where Sev remained skinny and lanky, though not for lack of trying. Potter looked alive, tanned skin, charming smile, sparkling hazel eyes. Severus was pale and his eyes were too dark and his face was too sharp, and he hated his nose, because it was too big on his face. *I'm just depressing myself*, Sev thought miserably, looking away from Potter having fun with his friends, *also I need to stop complimenting the prick.*

"Severus," Lucius Malfoy said, materialising next to Severus suddenly. The boy's heart started pounding and his stomach twisted at the sight of the older Slytherin.

"Lucius. Hello."

"I didn't know you were coming here," Malfoy said. Severus just shrugged in reply. He didn't want to be here anymore, "In any case I'll see you on Sunday in the same place as last time."

Severus swallowed and nodded and when he looked up Lucius was long gone. The boy's eyes located the door and quickly and eagerly made his way towards it, feeling like he was going to be



sick. Coming here had been a mistake, Sev had no friends, and no place at a party like this. Maybe this was Potter's plan all along? To remind him how utterly alone and hated he was.

Aubrey was still guarding the door, drinking more and more alcohol. His cheeks were flushed from it now.

"Halt!" he shouted over the music, holding his hand up and stumbling into an upright position, "Who goes there?" he slurred, his black and blue robes all screwed up.

"It's just me. I'm leaving," Severus said awkwardly. Aubrey peered at him closely, eyes narrowed as if he had trouble seeing, and then he snorted.

"I'm not supposed to let people out until three in the morning," the Ravenclaw informed him, "because of all the music, but honestly I'll make an exception for you. Nobody wants you here anyway I don't know why Potter fucking bothered."

That stung. Severus should've been used to the remarks thrown at him after years of bullying, but he wasn't. They all just piled on top of each other *ugly, unwanted, useless, Deatheater, poor*. Severus kept them all in his heart, and it was pretty unhealthy.

"Fuck you too, Aubrey," he said half-heartedly, because he wasn't in the mood. Aubrey grinned, as if pleased by the insult, and opened the door.

Severus stumbled out into the hallway and almost immediately the door closed behind him, shutting off the noise of the party. The Slytherin found himself alone once more. He shoved his hands into his pockets and started trekking back to the dungeons. It made little difference to him -- being lonely in a crowd of people, or being lonely out here. He was exhausted, sleep always brought him relief. In his dreams he could pretend he was anyone, he could pretend he was James fucking Potter if he wanted.

But Potter wasn't his problem right now. Sunday night was.

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Severus made a noise, even though he didn't mean to. It wasn't really a moan, more like something caught between a gasp and a hiss. Severus didn't moan, not here, not with *him*. You moan if you feel good, and this definitely didn't feel good. However quiet the noise that slipped past his lips had been, Lucius Malfoy heard it.

"Shut it," the blonde growled above Severus, grabbing his neck and shoving his face down into the dirty floor of the broom cupboard, "I don't want to hear you."

Severus couldn't see him, because he was lying on his stomach. His ratty old trousers had been shoved down to his knees and his equally ratty and old robe thrown somewhere to the side. Severus yearned for it now, so he could press his face into it to muffle whatever sounds of discomfort he would make with each of Lucius' piercing, rough thrusts.

They had started doing this somewhere half a year ago. Fucking, that is. Back then Lily hated Severus, as did pretty much everyone else. Lucius, who had always brought some degree of kindness in Sev's life, started souring also. That might've been to do with the fact that Severus was hesitant to take the Dark Mark, unlike the Malfoy. The first time they had fucked was in the Forbidden Forest, during one of Lucius' 'we need to talk' sessions in which he would try and persuade Severus to join the One Who Shall Not Be Named. One moment they had been bickering in harsh voices, and the next Lucius had Severus up against the tree and was rutting against him,

and they just kind of went from there.

They did it anywhere they could – empty classrooms, abandoned closets, out in the fields at night, in the forest, by the lake. The first few times Severus thought he wanted it. It was around that time that he realised he didn't love Lily, and that he might quite prefer men. He knew sex would hurt at first, and it had. Sev wobbled around Hogwarts sore the first few weeks and the constant jeers from Potter and his mates really didn't help. But the sex never got any better – it was always the same. Lucius would fuck Severus the same every time, always face down, no kissing, no tenderness. Not that the dark haired boy wanted that from Malfoy. He was lucky if he got a finger or two preparation before the actual thing, though that didn't happen often. It hurt, and then it just felt bad, but Severus got used to it, started believing that that was just the way sex worked. Lucius came every time, Sev never, though the Malfoy didn't seem to care. He made it clear that Severus was just a warm body to him – no feelings, no kissing, no noises, never completely naked, never on a bed. Those were the rules.

Sev didn't know why he let Lucius use him like that, but somehow he got addicted to it. He craved for human contact and that was virtually the only way he could get it, through Lucius' cold hands gripping his hips until they were bruised. And in flashes, when it got good for a little second, Severus actually felt pleasure. It was rare though.

But since Lily's return and her easy affection Severus stopped wanting Lucius. The man was dating Narcissa now, but didn't seem to care, continuously dragging Sev into dark corners and having the boy suck him off. It was starting to make Severus feel sick and he knew that he had the power to break it off, he just didn't know how. Lucius was the only constant in his life, and even though he was rude and mean and the sex sucked, Severus kind of needed it. He just needed *something*.

Lucius grunted above Severus, bringing him back to the present and the dusty, dirty interior of the closet just in time for the boy to feel his companion's come drip down onto his back. Severus hadn't even gotten hard and now he lay on the floor and half-listened as Lucius caught his breath.

"You know what, Severus?" the Malfoy asked after a few long seconds, rising and tucking himself back into his trousers, looking mighty pleased with himself, "You might be ugly but at least you have a nice ass. Maybe there's still hope for you," he stepped over his fellow Slytherin as the dark haired boy sat up and pulled his trousers up. He felt like shit,

"Lucius. I don't want to do this with you anymore," he said quietly, voice hoarse.

Lucius snorted, "Yeah. Right. See you later," he casually, unfazed, and walked out of the closet.

Severus exhaled shakily and leaned against one of the rough stone walls. It was cold here, and dark. The boy blindly reached out and located his cloak, tugging it over himself. He sniffled. *Damn, I'm getting a cold*, he thought with a detached sort of annoyance. Then he sniffled again, and a tear rolled down his cheek, and he let out a choked off sob, and he realised he wasn't catching a cold. He was simply crying. The Slytherin curled in on himself, his cold, trembling hands gripping at his knees as he sobbed quietly. Merlin, he was pathetic.

After however much time passed the boy dragged himself out of the closet. It was late, way past curfew, and the corridors were empty, only the flickering torches on the walls casting any light. Severus' ass ached from how rough Lucius had been and he found it a little hard to walk. He desperately wanted a shower, so he could scrub himself clean from the memory of the other boy's touch. He had to end this, and soon, or he'd completely lose it.

Severus hadn't realised he was taking little, hobbling steps, one hand trailing on the stone wall that

was there, ready to catch the Slytherin's weight if he fell, until he heard a concerned voice.

"Snape?"

Severus' head snapped up, and he was suddenly perfectly alert, a million excuses racing through his head as to why he was out of his dorm so late at night. But it wasn't a professor that had caught him – it was James Potter.

The Gryffindor stood there, a cloak underneath his arm, and a book from the restricted section of the library in his hand. He looked completely shocked at seeing Severus, and immediately the Slytherin just wanted to curl in on himself and hide. He didn't need to see Potter right now. Or ever, for the matter.

"You look like shit," the Gryffindor stated. Severus turned away, embarrassed. Weren't people meant to look nice after sex? *Idiot.*

"Thanks, Potter," Severus said, hoping there was bite to his words. Potter ignored his sarcasm and stepped closer, peering at the boy.

"You left the party early the other day and," he paused, "Wait...Are you high?" he asked suddenly.

"What?!" Severus demanded, angry and surprised, his voice echoing loudly down the corridor. He winced.

"Your eyes are red," Potter said, amusement glimmering in his hazel eyes. Then that amusement disappeared and he frowned, "Or...or is it from crying? Have you been crying? Are you alright?"

"Are you crazy, Potter?" Severus demanded defensively, completely caught off guard. He would never be able to live it down if the Gryffindor found out the truth, "Of course I haven't. And since when do you care?"

"Then it's the weed?" Potter taunted, eyebrow raised, ignoring the question. Before Severus' frustration could spill over and he could continue to get riled up, footsteps sounded down the corridor, insistently walking towards the boys. The two looked at each other with wide, scared eyes.

"Fuck," Severus whispered.

"Quick," Potter replied, grabbing Severus' arm and pushing him up against the wall. He pulled his cloak from underneath his arm and threw it over them and Severus was about to start going off on him, about how stupid that was, and now it was going to look like they were snogging, but before he could Potter pressed up against him and clamped his warm, calloused hand over the Slytherin's mouth.

"Be quiet," Potter whispered, voice low, breath hot where it brushed against Severus' forehead. He was so *tall*.

He obviously did it so that the cloak covered both of them but it still made Severus' breath catch in his throat. He was still oversensitive from the fuck earlier and Potter being pressed against him like this...Severus dropped his eyes, feeling his cheeks heat up and his body start to shake.

Professor McGonagall appeared around the corner of the corridor, and she hurried down, her sharp eyes sliding over the walls, black robes swirling behind her. She didn't even spare Sev and Potter a glance and soon disappeared through a doorway. Severus was in shock and looked up at Potter, gaping. The Gryffindor was grinning, and he was way too close, his sparkling eyes looking directly

at Severus. He removed his hand.

“It’s an invisibility cloak,” he said proudly.

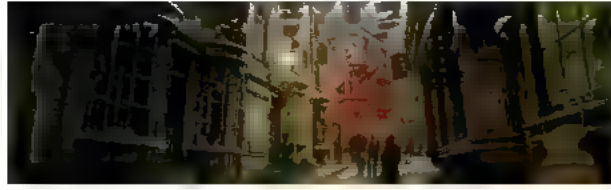
Severus couldn’t give less of a fuck about what it was. His heart hammered in his chest and he shoved James back, just needing the Gryffindor to get the fuck away from him. Potter stumbled backwards, almost tripping over his magical cloak, and his back hit the opposite wall. For a second he looked shocked and then fury appeared in his eyes.

“What the *fuck* Snape?” he hissed.

“Don’t ever do that again,” Severus growled, and didn’t wait to see Potter’s expression as he took off running down the corridor like the coward he was.



## Whatever You Drink



"You're not trying hard enough," Lily told James, looking at him from across the table in the Great Hall at breakfast about a week after Halloween. The boy let out a frustrated hiss of air.

"What do you want me to do? I invited him to the party and he *bailed*."

"He doesn't have any friends, James," Lily said softly, and both of them twisted in their seats to look at Snape. He was sat at the very end of the Slytherin table, away from his housemates, not really eating, chin resting on his bony hand. He looked miserable, and even James felt a pang of pity for him, "He probably freaked out and left."

"Well then let him freak out and leave," the Gryffindor shrugged, "he's not my responsibility."

"Yes he is," Lily said firmly, and James could see anger in her eyes as she stood up, abandoning her pancakes, "You made his life hell, you and the other Marauders and you all know it. *Fix it*."

James watched her walk off and as she did he couldn't help but agree with her. He had been an immature, jealous asshole when he first started picking on Snape but now he couldn't help but wonder if the Slytherin would've turned out differently if it wasn't for the bullying. The Gryffindor watched him across the room, studied him. He used to think Snape was the most disgusting, ugly person in the world but now, looking at him, he decided that that wasn't true. He was just a boy, and James didn't understand why he had hated him for so long. He sighed and stood up just as the rest of the Marauders stumbled into the Great Hall. It had been a full moon the previous night so Remus looked exhausted as he leaned on Sirius, Peter shuffling in after them.

"Morning Prongs!" Sirius said cheerfully.

"Shut up, you're so loud," Remus groaned, burying his face in Sirius' shoulder. It was as if he were hangover, "Where are you going, James?" he asked as they slid onto the bench.

"I'm going to invite our new Slytherin friend to come to Hogsmeade with us this afternoon," he said simply. Sirius groaned and now he looked more miserable than Remus.

"Prongs you're not serious--"

"No, that's a good idea," Remus interrupted, slumping against Peter now and reaching for some toast like a zombie, "the faster you become friends the faster you can stop trying."

Sirius' eyes widened and he grinned, "Now *that's* brilliant, Moony," he looked like he wanted to kiss his friend but instead he turned to James, "make him trust you and then you can just move on, and be civil with him and he and Lily can be best buds and you don't have to see him and you and Lily will have babies and get married--"

"Woah, slow down," Remus said. James sighed, nodded distractedly, and circled the table, heading for the Slytherin one and ignoring his friend's remarks being called after him. Sirius was right if he got Snape to trust him and like him then he wouldn't have to go out of his way to prove that his

intentions were good. They'd be able to coexist without being forced to actually be friends. It was the perfect plan.

"Morning Snape," James said with a charismatic grin, sliding into the free seat opposite the Slytherin. The boy looked up, and he looked almost as tired as Remus, dark circles under his eyes. He glared at James.

"Fuck do you want, Potter?" he snapped. James faked offence.

"Is that how you treat all your friends?"

"We're not friends," Snape sneered. James honestly wanted to punch him. *Why* was he being so difficult? He almost just explained Lily's plan to him in order to have Snape go along with it, but he knew that if Lily found out he took the easy way out she wouldn't go to the Halloween ball with James. Instead she'd probably go with Snape.

"I was wondering if you'd like to--"

"No," Snape said immediately, standing up. His tattered robes hung on him loosely and his plate of food was untouched. James gaped at him,

"You don't even know what I was going to say!" he protested, also scrambling to his feet.

"I don't care," Snape informed him, making for the door.

"Oi! Wait!" James chased after him and out of the Great Hall. The corridors were deserted this early in the morning and the Gryffindor's voice and footsteps were obnoxiously loud, "I was just inviting you to come to Hogsmeade with me and the boys!"

"Why would you think I'd want to do that?" Snape asked, stopping abruptly and causing James to almost barge into him. The wizards playing poker on the closest painting paused their game to look at the two boys curiously. Snape's face was twisted and full of anger when he whirled on the surprised Gryffindor, "I don't know what you think this is but you're mad if you think I want to be your fucking friend. I know this may come as a shock to you Oh-Glorious-Potter, but not everyone wants to be part of your little weird clique. So why don't you just continue on your merry way and *leave me the fuck alone.*"

The sudden explosion left James speechless. He had never heard Snape go off like that, at least not without reason. He stood there, stunned, and stared at the flushed Slytherin as the echo of his anger died away. Eventually James broke the heavy silence by clearing his throat.

"Right. Yeah," he nodded, "Forget I ever asked you, slimy git."

It was a weak insult, but the best James could come up with. He couldn't do this, couldn't deal with the Slytherin and his fucking mood swings. Angry at Snape and at himself, James turned on his heel and strode back to the Great Hall, ready to vent to all his friends.

Snape only had one person to vent to – Lily.

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The only reason Severus went to Hogsmeade was because he needed to get away from Lucius. The blonde had demanded they meet again, and he was clearly sexually frustrated. Sev didn't know if he could take another fucking from him, not when it made him feel physically sick. He had made the excuse of going to the little town in order to get the other Slytherin off his back, and now, as he

submerged in the adorable little streets, he was starting to regret it.

He didn't normally come to Hogsmeade because he had nobody to go with. It was known that big groups of friends or couples came down here during the weekends, but people like Snape had no place here. They had no place anywhere. The boy also had nothing to do here. He dejectedly walked through the cobbled streets and looked at the displays in the shops. Quills, cauldrons, pets, new robes...all things Severus couldn't afford. It was pathetic, just him walking and looking at things he couldn't have as groups of Hogwarts students sauntered past, laughing and chatting, a few throwing dirty looks at the lone Slytherin, though most just ignored him.

Severus just wanted to go back to the castle, but that would mean risking bumping into Lucius and having his cock inside himself, and that was the last thing he wanted. The boy regarded his shoes as he walked, dirty and worn and ugly, just like himself. He wasn't paying attention where he was going which was how he barrelled right into the back of James Potter. Of course, just his fucking luck.

"Fuck-," the Slytherin cursed when he hit his nose painfully against the Gryffindor's shoulder. It was like walking into a brick wall. Potter turned around, surprised, and Severus clutched his nose.

"Hello to you too, Snivellus," the Gryffindor said, voice laced with amusement.

"Why the fuck are you just standing there?!" Sev demanded, pulling his hand back from his aching nose, pleased there was no blood on it, "You're like a plank of fucking wood."

"Oh sorry, am I not allowed to stand?" Potter taunted, "Besides if you were paying attention to where you were going then you wouldn't have gotten that potato of yours hurt!"

Severus glared at Potter heatedly and automatically covered his nose with his hand, "Fuck you, Potter."

"Right back at you," the Gryffindor said, unfazed. But of course he couldn't just leave it at that, "What are you even doing here?" he looked around the narrow, isolated street the two found themselves on, alone, "It's not like you can afford anything."

Severus felt himself going red, "I can afford good manners."

"Oh yeah, sure, sorry Saint Snape," Potter rolled his eyes. He was seriously getting under Sev's skin. If he was braver, the Slytherin would've thrown his bag in the Gryffindor's face.

"Where's your little gang?" he growled instead, looking around the otherwise empty road, "They tired of you already?"

Potter snorted, "Actually Remus is ill, Sirius is taking care of him, and Peter is studying."

"You presume to think that I actually care," Snape hissed. Potter rolled his eyes again.

"Don't you get bored of being so negative all the time?"

"Don't you get bored of picking on me all the time?" Severus retaliated.

A tense silence settled over the two. Sev hadn't meant to say that, hadn't meant to let Potter know that his actions were hurtful, that they affected him in any way. It just kind of slipped out. Severus was so *tired* lately – coming to terms that he was gay wasn't that hard, but coming to terms with the fact that nobody would ever want him...that was harder.

"L...", James licked his lips nervously.

"Whatever, just fuck off," Severus said quietly, turning away.

"Hey!" Potter called out, almost involuntarily. Severus didn't know why he stopped and half-turned, he didn't know what he expected to hear. Potter looked a little anxious and a little embarrassed as he shoved his hands into his pockets, "Do you want to come for a butterbeer?" he asked gently.

"Not particularly no," Severus said. Potter sighed.

"Seriously, it's just a drink. Stop treating it like it's the end of the world."

"Aren't you embarrassed to be seen with me?" Sev asked with an eye-roll. Potter frowned.

"I don't care what people think. Just stop being a stubborn prick and come for butterbeer or coffee or whatever the hell you want to drink. My treat. As a form of apology," he said, and Sev could tell it took a lot out of him to do so – imply he was in the wrong. The Slytherin exhaled, wondering if perhaps James wasn't in the wrong here. Perhaps it was him. Severus tried not to show his nerves show.

"Fine. Okay."

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*He looks almost nice*, James thought distractedly. They were at the Three Broomsticks in a little secluded corner booth. Just James and Snape. They both ended up getting butterbeer and as Snap drank, he got some of the foam on the tip of his nose. He was completely unaware of it and...well, it was a little endearing. *He almost looks nice*.

James pinched his own leg underneath the table, horrified he could even think such a thing. Snape was ugly and vile! There was nothing *nice* about him or his greasy hair or his too-pale skin.

"You have foam on your nose," James said, trying to sound casual.

"Oh?" Snape reached up and rubbed it off with the sleeve of his tattered robe. The past five minutes they had sat here in awkward silence, listening to the clangour of the rest of the inn, overflowing with Hogwarts students. Snape cleared his throat and his delicate pale hands went around his mug, "So...uh...what's Lupin sick with?"

"The Black Death," James said neutrally and Snape cocked an eyebrow, "It's tragic," the Gryffindor cracked a grin. Snape shook his head.

"Such a twat," he muttered, almost to himself. Another tense silence settled over them and neither knew what to say. Awkwardly the Gryffindor took a sip of his beer.

"So, you still in love with Lily?" he asked nonchalantly, because honestly it had been bothering him lately. This was the perfect opportunity to ask. James had to remind himself that he hated Snape and *why* he hated him in the first place. He saw Snape flinch and was ready to fight him about it. He could pretend to be his friend, but he couldn't stand it if the Slytherin was *still* trying to steal his girl.

"No," Snape muttered.

"What?" that surprised James. It had been a rhetorical question, because James was *sure* he knew



the answer. That was how his and Snape's feud had started – over Lily! There was no way the boy was over her...

"Yes, I know, how shocking," Snape said sarcastically, "But no, don't worry, I'm not going to steal the girl of your dreams."

"Not like she'd want you anyway," James said. He didn't mean to. Comments like these just came naturally to him when he was with Snape because it was his job to make the boy miserable. But when he saw the Slytherin tense again it didn't bring him any satisfaction.

"Why do you *always* have to be such an asshole?" Snape asked, his eyes dark and stormy when he looked at James. Before the Gryffindor could come up with a plausible excuse, Lucius Malfoy materialised right next to them, seemingly out of thin air, his grey eyes cold and calculating.

"Severus," he said icily, completely ignoring James. Snape tensed even more if that was possible, and James looked between the two of them, puzzled. Snape almost looked...scared, "Please don't tell me you left Hogwarts to drink butterbeer with this lowlife."

"Oi-," James started, but Snape got abruptly to his feet, interrupting him.

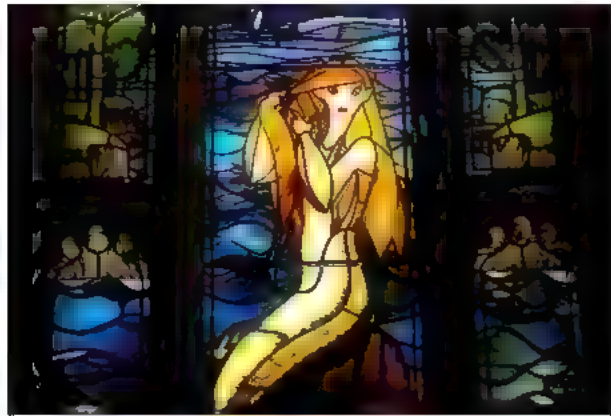
"I was leaving anyway," he sneered, grabbing his ugly, ripped up coat.

A cold, leering smile appeared on Lucius' face and it seriously unnerved James, "Perfect," the man hissed, grabbing Snape's arm, "Let's go back to the castle. We have things to *discuss*."

He practically dragged the dark haired boy out, leaving James shocked and confused and honestly a little freaked out. Clearly something was going on between Malfoy and Snape, and it wasn't anything good.

*Since when do I care?* James suddenly thought, angrily turning back to his butterbeer. This whole situation was messing with his mind and emotions and he didn't need that, not now. He wasn't sure if he was ready for this sacrifice anymore, not even for Lily.

## Blur of Reality



For the next week Potter left Severus blissfully alone. So did Lucius, for the matter. After the fuck in the bushes halfway between Hogsmeade and Hogwarts he seemed sated enough that he didn't feel like dragging Sev into dirty closets...for now. The sex that time had been worse than usual – brutal, rough and completely emotionless. Sev felt like a piece of meat after, like a sex toy that had only one purpose. He threw up when Lucius left and wondered if this was rape. He had consented didn't he? At least the first few times...*it doesn't matter*, Severus remembered thinking as he trekked back to Hogwarts in the biting November wind, *it's not like I can tell anyone. It's not like anyone would care.*

He could imagine Potter and his friends jeering if they ever found out. They'd probably say that Severus deserved it. And maybe he did. Maybe this was his punishment for all the bad things he did in life. Severus had scrubbed himself clean that night when he got back to the castle, and every night after that, but the Lucius' disgusting fingers remained on him in the form of ugly purple bruises on his hips.

Which was why he was here tonight – the Prefect's Bathroom, in the late hours of the night. Severus wasn't allowed into this beautiful bathroom with a pool instead of a normal bathtub. He wasn't a Prefect. And yet somehow the scented, bubbly, multi-coloured water he sat in right now soothed his aches better than the hurried showers in his dorm bathroom, where he was afraid somebody would barge in and embarrass him in front of all the other Slytherin's. Here Severus had peace and quiet.

He brushed his pale fingers over the bubbles collected on top of the deliciously hot water and as he did, the bubbles broke away and took to air, glimmering as they sailed to the ceiling, only to bounce off and, unbroken, drift back down. Severus smiled. This was nice. He let out a little pleased sigh and sunk deeper into the water, so that it lapped gently over his chin. He closed his eyes and allowed himself, if only for a small moment, to forget all about the troubles in his life. He didn't think about Lily, or Potter, or Lucius, or the fact that everyone hated him, or the fact that he was again going to stay all alone at Hogwarts for Christmas, or the One Who Shall Not Be Named, and he just relaxed.

Unfortunately that relaxation didn't last long because suddenly it was interrupted with the sound of the door creaking open. Severus' eyes snapped open and fearfully he looked at whoever was about to get him into trouble. It was James Potter. Of course it was. That prick was *everywhere*. Sev held his breath as the Gryffindor walked in, humming something under his breath. He didn't seem to

notice the Slytherin as he hung up his robe and put down his towel, but then he turned and his eyes widened when his eyes landed on Severus, who was unsuccessfully attempting to hide in the bubbles.

"You're not a Prefect," Potter said, amusement blossoming on his face as he cocked his head to the side. Sev glared at him heatedly,

"Get out, I was here first," he growled. Suddenly self conscious he crossed his arms over his chest even though Potter couldn't see it anyway under the water. The Slytherin hoped his enemy would think the blush on his cheeks was from the heat of the bathroom.

"That's not how it works, snakey-boy," Potter said, pleased with himself, "you're not even allowed in here."

"Why are you here so late anyway?" Sev snapped, because he was fully aware that Potter was right. The Gryffindor shrugged and pulled his jumper over his head, leaving him in a black t-shirt. He chucked the jumper onto a bench lining the walls of the bathroom, and carefully laid his slightly fogged up glasses on top of his clothes. He looked different without them, older somehow.

"I prefer it at this time," he said calmly as he casually pulled his t-shirt over his head, "it's quieter and usually nobody's here."

Severus didn't hear that last part because he was too busy staring at Potter's naked, revealed torso. His shoulders were broad, but that was visible even when he wore clothes. What *wasn't* visible were his perfect pecks and rock-hard abs. Sev's eyes slid over the other boy's body, his tanned skin, the dark trail of hair leading down to his...Sev felt all of his blood rush to his face and he turned away quickly, heart pounding. Potter hadn't noticed him staring and continued to blabber as he undressed, but Severus kept his eyes firmly on the water, trying to get his escalated heartbeat to calm down.

He only looked up when he saw the water shift.

"Ah," Potter let out a delighted sigh. He sunk onto the little underwater bench and the water lapped up only to his ribcage where it almost completely covered Severus' shoulders. The Gryffindor leaned his head back, a pleased smile on his face. He looked like some devilish God. *Merlin, I hate him*, Sev thought bitterly, "This is nice."

"No it's not," Sev replied immediately. Potter rolled his eyes,

"Merlin, how long are you going to keep this act up? You don't hate me *that* much, do you?"

"You'd be surprised," Sev grumbled. Potter smiled.

"Look. You don't have to be my best friend. Can't we just be civil to each other?"

"Since when do you want that?" Severus asked, eyes narrowed. He desperately wanted to get out of the water, and away from Potter, who was just sitting in the bath, looking so goddamn gorgeous.

Potter shrugged, "I've wanted it for a while now. After this year we have one more left in Hogwarts, and then we're off into the big world. I don't particularly want to continue hating you."

Severus exhaled, but he had to admit that Potter had a point. Juggling being a Deatheater and hating the Gryffindor sounded exhausting, "Fine. Civil. I don't hate you."

"I don't hate you either, Snape," the Gryffindor said with a broad smile. It sounded weird coming

out of his mouth when he was looking at Sev like that, his eyes all sparkly, now full of warmth and friendliness when for years they had been cold and cruel. It made the Slytherin shiver. He was terrified by his sudden desire to climb into Potter's arms. No. He had to dislike the boy, otherwise he would be like every other girl and gay guy in the school, falling for Potter's rugged good charm. He couldn't deal with the humiliation of that. His life had already been ruined by competing with Potter, he didn't need to compete *for* him. Not that he'd ever stand a chance.

"Yeah. Brilliant," the boy said distractedly. Potter frowned,

"Speaking off. What was that thing with Malfoy and you last week?"

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The question hit home, James saw that. Snape tensed and the blood drained from his face and for a second he looked like someone had slapped him. And then anger returned to his dark eyes and he glared at the Gryffindor with so much hate that it almost made James flinch.

"None of your business, Potter," the Slytherin spat. He seemed agitated, anxious, something in his demeanour changed, and it made James...worried.

"It was just a question, relax."

There were all these new emotions that James was feeling in regards to Snape, and in regards to Lily too. He found that now when he saw Snape in the corridors he didn't recoil and automatically want to punch him in the face. Instead he wanted to go up and tease the boy good-heartedly, because he liked the Slytherin's reactions to that – he got all dark eyes and blushy and annoyed and it was kind of funny and kind of...cute. James still couldn't come to terms with the new adjectives surrounding Snape's persona; cute, adorable, endearing. Those words scared him and he tried his best to remind himself that Snape was an ugly, greasy, annoying git. Moments like these didn't help though – in the bathtub, Snape was flushed from the heat, only the tops of his slim, pale shoulders peeking up above the water. His hair was wet, falling into his dark, angry eyes. James couldn't stop looking at him, and that scared him. Did Snape always look like this, and the Gryffindor just hadn't noticed? He had no idea.

His newfound obsession with Snape made him almost forget about Lily. He didn't think about the New Year's Ball or the promises he made to her. His wish to just befriend Snape and then leave him alone was quickly dispersing – James didn't want to leave Snape alone.

"You should go," the Slytherin said, all growly and angry. James raised an eyebrow.

"I just got here, and I have more of a right to be here than you."

"Of course," Snape said sarcastically, "You have more of a right to everything because you're a rich prick, isn't it?"

"No, that's not what I—" James started, and then paused. He didn't have to explain himself to Snape. Sometimes he forgot that the other boy could push his buttons too, "If you don't want to be here then you leave."

James saw uncertainty flicker in Snape's dark eyes. It might've been the Gryffindor's imagination but he swore that the blush on the other boy's cheeks deepened. The Slytherin paused for a few seconds, clearly contemplating what he should do, and eventually he drew his mouth into a tight line and with a quick, almost violent movement, he stood up. James had never seen him completely naked and his first thought was *Merlin, he's skinny*. Then, as his eyes slid over the boy's



protruding collarbones and surprisingly nice curve of his arse, he thought, *Christ, he's kind of pretty*. The last thought that flew through the boy's head as Snape angrily made his way over to the bench where his things were, was *Why are there bruises on his hips?*

"What happened?" the Gryffindor blurted, his worry getting the best of him. Snape glared at him and hurriedly wrapped a towel around his waist, concealing the purple bruises on his hips. They had been in the shape of fingers, "Who did that?"

"Fuck off," Snape hissed, shoving on his undergarments while simultaneously trying to hold onto the towel. But James wasn't having it. He got up from the warm water and, not caring that he was completely naked, approached Snape.

"Someone grabbed you there-," he started, voice laced with worry.

"I said *fuck off*," Snape shoved at James' slippery chest with one hand as he tried to get his shirt on. James, angry and wanting answers, shoved the Slytherin up against the wall, harder than he intended. Snape's head smacked against the tiles and he winced before glaring at James heatedly, his shirt falling from his hand, "What the hell is wrong with you Potter?!"

James slammed both his hands on the wall on either side of Snape's head and the boy flinched. The Gryffindor was pissed now. Not at Snape though, but at whoever hurt him, though in that moment he didn't realise that. He used the advantage of being much bigger than the Slytherin to cage him in.

"Who gave you those bruises?" James growled, hoping to intimidate Snape. No such luck. The Slytherin crossed his arms over his still-naked, pale chest and looked up at James coolly,

"Maybe it was you, you fucking asshole."

James' stomach twisted. He hadn't actually hurt Snape in a while...or had he? He could get pretty rough with people and Snape was so small that maybe... "It wasn't me," James said firmly, and to prove it he hurriedly tugged down Snape's underwear, just enough to reveal his bruised hips.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Snape demanded, his voice a pitch higher than normal, his face bright red. James ignored him and grabbed his hips, to prove that the marks weren't from his fingers. But they were the wrong way round. Snape grabbed his wrists and tried to get the Gryffindor off him unsuccessfully.

"It wasn't me," James repeated, and then roughly turned Snape around. He heard the boy inhale sharply as the Gryffindor pushed his face against the wall. Then James placed his hands on the bruises on the boy's hips from the back, and smiled triumphantly, "My hands are too big!" he declared.

Snape was silent, and tense, his shoulders trembling ever so slightly. He had his face pressed into the wall, and James only then realised the position they were in. Snape's arse was inches away from his crotch. There was only one way those bruises could've gotten onto the Slytherin's hips.

"Oh no!" James proclaimed, stepping away and letting go of the boy's chilled skin. Immediately Snape whirled around and started shoving his clothes back on, "Someone fucked you didn't they?" James demanded, not understanding why that thought made him angry. He wasn't homophobic, but the thought of some guy having sex with Snape made him see red, "It was Malfoy wasn't it? Oh fuck, that's disgusting."

"Shut up Potter," Snape shoved past him, a look of complete despair in his eyes, the buttons of his

shirt not done up, shoes in hand, and ran from the bathroom.

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James cast the silencing spell on his bed and pulled the curtains closed, but he could still hear his roommates, talking in loud whispers about the prank planned for the first day of snowfall, even though it was well past midnight and all of them should've been asleep. James tried to ignore them, but was unable to fall asleep due to the amount of noise his friends were making. He wasn't in the mood to speak to them, not after his earlier encounter with Snape. He couldn't believe the boy was gay, and that he had let *Malfoy* of all people touch him. The thought made James' anger return, though he couldn't quite tell why he was so pissed off. Then he remembered the way Snape had reacted to Malfoy at the Three Broomsticks, how scared he had looked. *What if Malfoy is forcing him?* The boy thought. He'd have to check that soon.

Finally the other Marauders settled down and the room was filled with darkness and silence. Despite that James couldn't fall asleep – Snape's naked body kept flashing in his head. He was so pale, and so skinny, but there was something alluring about him. *Merlin, gross*, James tried to tell himself, but the bottom line was that he didn't think Snape was gross. Not anymore anyway.

*He takes it up the arse*, James thought distractedly. He should've been disgusted, he really should've. Instead his mind decided to screw him over as his thoughts began to wonder...what did Snape look like when he got fucked? Was he loud or quiet? James' eyes fluttered shut on his own accord and he couldn't help but start imagining things. In his head he saw Snape lying on a bed, pale legs spread apart, a cock thrusting inside him. The boy's head was thrown back, mouth swollen, cheeks red, eyes closed. James felt his blood rush south and his cock start to swell at his imagination and he quickly snapped his eyes open, heart pounding. *No, no, no, no* he thought desperately, but his desire got the best of him.

When James closed his eyes all he saw was Snape. In seconds he was too concentrated on his fantasy to worry about the fact that *he was getting hard over Severus Snape*. His hand subconsciously went down between his legs and the Gryffindor palmed at his erection through his boxers as his imagination continued to run wild. *How would he look like? What noises would he make?* The thoughts were a frenzy in James' head. He imagined Snape scrambling at the pillows and the covers in his pleasure as the cock continued to pound him, imagined that mouth that usually sneered and hissed offenses at James now letting out little breathy moans and pleas.

It was almost too much, just thinking about that. James pressed the side of his face into his pillow and bit his lip as his hand slipped inside his boxers and started to roughly stroke his already leaking cock. He was really doing it, he was wanking while thinking about Snape, his worst enemy and the person he was supposed to hate.

James' stomach was all in knots and he completely lost control over what he was thinking, just giving in to his hidden desires. Suddenly the covers Snape was lying on changed, and they were gold and red, and the person fucking the Slytherin was James. He imagined plunging into boy's wet, hot entrance, imagined how amazing it would feel, how would it compare to all the girls and boys James had been with before? James was quickly approaching his orgasm, and in his head so was Snape. He saw the boy's cock twitching against his smooth, pale stomach as he whined and whimpered, clawing at James and whispering his name in the most urgent way.

James came, hard. His cock twitched in his hand as he spurted come all over his gold and red blankets. The boy bit the pillow to keep back a groan of pleasure as his whole body shook. He held onto his throbbing cock for a few moments as he came down from the ecstasy and basked in the afterglow of his orgasm.

James rolled onto his back and looked at the canopy overhead, breathing hard. Then he pressed his clean hand over his eyes, the other one soaked with his come. He felt guilty, and unsatisfied. Worse thoughts than fucking Snape crept into James' head. Now the boy felt cold and alone, and more than anything he wanted the Slytherin there, wrapped up in James' blankets, in his arms.

That was a terrifying and complicated thought.

## Weather Forecasts



A week passed, then another, and Severus came to the conclusion that Potter was following him around. At first he was annoyed and anxious, not knowing what the Gryffindor was planning. Every time he saw Sev he'd smile and come over to tease him a little or ask about his day and at first the Slytherin didn't even think it was weird because he thought that Potter was distracting him while his friend set up a prank...but soon he realised that wasn't the case. Potter was just talking to him. For no reason. And he was being *nice*.

He'd come and sit opposite Severus at breakfast and because the Slytherin was used to eating alone he'd feel self-conscious and touch his food less than he usually did, mostly just swearing at Potter and attempting to get him to go away. But then Potter made up this game where he'd put weird things together like put bananas into a BLT and dare Sev to eat it, and Sev would dare him to eat something weird back and it became a peculiar little morning ritual that was halfway between banter and insults. Potter would walk beside Sev in the corridors, sometimes he'd sit with him in divination. Of course mostly he still bothered the Slytherin but there was nothing cruel or malicious about his actions anymore.

And suddenly Severus could understand why so many people were in love with James Potter. He pretended the reason he allowed himself to be in the company of the Gryffindor was because Potter's presence seemed to keep Lucius away. The blonde walked around Hogwarts with Narcissa hanging off his arm, always looking vaguely pissed off. He didn't approach Sev to try and have sex with him though, because Severus wasn't alone. It felt good to be away from his and his toxic touch. Severus supposed he had something to thank James for then.

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Severus jerked awake abruptly when thunder crashed outside. For a second the boy was disoriented, his heavy eyelids falling over his eyes, hair tumbling onto his forehead. Around him bookshelves climbed up to the tall ceiling and the gothic window on the wall next to his head was being viciously attacked by rain. Severus blinked and looked down at his arms, folded over an old book about Romanian magic history. He had fallen asleep in the library, on a Friday night. How sad.

The boy leaned back against his chair and yawned, stretching his stiff arms over his head. He had no idea what time it was but as the dim room lit up again with the lightning outside he decided it was probably time to go. Madame Pince, the young but moody librarian, gave him a little glare as he walked out, even though he made sure to put all the books he borrowed back where he found them.

As the boy walked through the empty Hogwarts corridors he decided he didn't want to go to the Slytherin dungeons just yet his roommates hated when he was there and there was a bigger chance of bumping into Lucius there. It was a cold, stormy night so Sev couldn't go brood by the lake like he did most days, so instead he subjected himself to trailing through the castle like one of



the ghosts. Every so often another student would rush past since there were still a few hours until curfew, but none of them offer Severus as much as a smile. That was typical.

The boy somehow found himself near the kitchens and the entrance to the Hufflepuff common room. He didn't know why he was there until his stomach let out a sudden dissatisfied growl. Severus frowned down and placed a hand over his tattered jumper as if that would make his hunger disappear. Recently he tried to eat as little as possible in the Great Hall, mostly because he was self-conscious about other students taking the piss of the way he ate, and also because he was scared someone might've spat in his food, or worse. *This will just intensify when they find out I want to join the Death eaters*, Severus thought. He didn't want to think about that issue, not now, so with a sigh he pushed open the kitchen doors, hoping to get some snacks that would fill him up. However as he entered the kitchen, where the house elves were bustling about despite the late hour, he was forced to stop in his tracks.

"Master Severus!" one of the house elves exclaimed cheerfully as the boy was assaulted by delicious smells, "Have you come to join Master James and Master Remus?"

Snape swallowed as his eyes landed on Potter and Lupin, sitting at a counter in the centre of the huge kitchen and eating from a tall plate of sandwiches. It was too late to retreat into the dark because both the Gryffindors spotted Snape. A smile bloomed on Potter's face, a smile that made Sev's heart jump in his chest, and Lupin's face was unreadable.

"Snape!" Potter exclaimed cheerfully, "and here I thought you never ate!"

"I just want some water," Snape said in a huff, because Lupin didn't look too pleased at his presence, but then the boy surprised him by suddenly saying,

"You don't look too well I think you should have some of our sandwiches."

Severus hesitated but before he could decline Potter cheerfully pulled out a spare stool for him. The quiet rumble of the Slytherin's stomach enforced his thoughts that it was probably best to eat. The Gryffindors didn't look like they wanted to play pranks right now, both of them in sweatpants and t-shirts. They looked harmless. Still anxious, Sev slid onto the stool and made sure he was sitting as far from Potter as possible.

"Here, eat," Lupin encouraged him, pushing the plate of sandwiches towards him as the house elves twirled around them, bustling about the kitchen. One of them looked at Severus with big eyes on her ugly little face.

"Master Severus would like tea?" she asked in a croaky voice. Sev winced at the sound of his name but gave a little curt nod. He felt Potter's and Lupin's eyes on him and it made him uncomfortable, so he didn't look at them as he reached for a sandwich.

"So, what brings you into the kitchen, Snape?" Potter asked, completely forgetting his meal in order to openly stare at the Slytherin.

"Food," Sev said curtly, picking a tiny bit of his sandwich and popping it into his mouth, "Obviously."

Lupin let out a sigh and stood up, sandwich in hand, "Right. I'm going to the tower then. Thankyou," he threw in the direction of the house elves, who all happily chirped *thank you Mr Remus* and continued their work. The boy left, and Sev was left alone with Potter. An awkward silence settled over them as they slowly chewed their food. It used to be so easy – they used to hate each other and their only goal was to make each other's lives miserable. Now they were tethering

on the thin line between hate and like, and Sev didn't know if they were friends or not. Besides, there were many unspoken things between them.

"So," Potter said after a moment, "You don't love Lily anymore because you're gay?"

Severus felt his cheeks burning at the sudden proclamation, "Shut *up* Potter," he hissed, but none of the house elves were paying attention to their conversation anyway.

"What? I'm just curious," the Gryffindor said innocently. Severus was so embarrassed he wanted the floor to swallow him up. The sandwich tasted like ash in his mouth.

"It's none of your business," he said quietly. Potter sighed,

"When are you going to stop being so stand-offish with me?"

"How about never?" Severus offered, putting down the remaining half of his sandwich and standing up. Potter looked at him with his soft hazel eyes and Severus wanted, more than ever, to disappear.

"You're going to be friends with me, Snape, whether you want it or not," the Gryffindor stated, and a smile spread on his face. Severus' narrowed his eyes,

"I seriously doubt it," he seethed, feeling his irritation spike at how confident and sure of himself Potter was. Sev was going to make him fuck off, one way or another. But when he did he'd have to deal with the consequences – namely Lucius. But he'd cross that bridge when he got to it, right now he needed to get out of the kitchen and away from Potter's charming smiles.

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Severus sat at the window and watched Potter and his friends having a snowball fight outside of the castle, enjoying the first snow fall of the winter. Sev himself was miserable, as always, and had taken a break from his studies to sit in the window of an abandoned classroom and trace patterns into the frosted glass with his finger. Everyone else was outside, ice skating, making snow forts or just enjoying the cold, but the Slytherin was inside, isolated, alone.

As the boy watched, Potter threw a snowball and hit Pettigrew in the back of the head. He was so graceful in his movements that Sev was envious. The Gryffindor leaned down to pick more snow up and then stopped, breathless, flushed and grinning, and looked directly up. He spotted Sev and his smile widened – he waved as if they were old friends. Severus felt himself blushing and he turned away from the window, pretending he hadn't been watching the Gryffindor. He didn't catch Potter breaking away from his friends in order to run back into Hogwarts.

Winter half term was just days away and Severus was coming to terms with the fact that once more he'd be left in the castle alone. He hated Christmas. To him it consisted of a painfully awkward dinner with a bunch of miserable kids who didn't want to go home, no presents except one from Lily, and then days spent dying of boredom and loneliness. Still, it was better than going back to Spinner's End and facing his father.

"Severus."

The voice simultaneously started Sev and made his blood run cold. *Fuck*, he thought briefly, turning around in the window, all tense. Lucius stood in the doorway of the classroom, his cold, piercing eyes focused on his housemate. Severus hadn't even thought that the blonde could find him here and now he watched as the older boy closed the door to the room behind himself. Severus felt sick. *No please, not now...*

"Lucius," he said faintly.

"You've been avoiding me," Lucius said sharply, eyes narrowed, "Why?"

"I told you. I don't want to keep doing...," Severus winced, "*that* with you."

"You seemed perfectly content to do it before," Lucius quipped.

"Well I changed my mind," Severus slid off the window and walked towards the door, trying to be confident and unwavering in his steps, "I have work to do."

Lucius grabbed his arm as the Slytherin attempted to walk past and kept him in place, his jaw clenched, "Listen. Narcissa is going to her family for Christmas but I'm staying at Hogwarts," his grip tightened on Sev's thin arm and the boy winced, "and so are you. We'll have plenty of time alone and I'm not going to stop what we started. You agreed to this remember? So be quiet, and turn around."

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James was excited – earlier he had gone to Dumbledore and asked him if it was possible for Snape to come to his house for the Christmas half term. When Lily had first insisted that this happens James was disgusted; he couldn't imagine having that prick in his home at such a jolly time. But over the last month or so James had been looking forward to spending more time with the Slytherin and getting to know him better, because he kind of liked the boy. He never thought he'd feel that way but it happened – Snape was sarcastic, funny in a very ironic kind of way, but he was also kind and caring, especially towards Lily. It was also clear that he had built up a wall around himself, and James wanted desperately to break it down.

When James saw the boy in the window of the empty classroom he abandoned the snowball fight he had been having with the Marauders, even though he was winning, and practically ran up the stairs to the third floor, wanting to persuade the Slytherin to come to his home for Christmas. Even the staircases seemed to favour this, as they moved to lead him straight to the classroom that Snape was in. James hoped that the boy hadn't left as he approached the door, unable to keep the grin off his face.

He would've barged right in if he hadn't heard Snape's voice before.

"Stop it!" the boy shouted, and despite the fact that his voice was muffled by the door, the fear in it was clear. A second voice, very familiar, answered.

"Shut up."

Dread settled over James as he realised what was happening. The assumptions that Malfoy was forcing Snape into sex had been floating around James' head for weeks now – Snape would flinch every time the blonde came close to him, and leave the room if Malfoy walked in. But he didn't have any proof until he got over his shock and shoved open the door to the classroom. James walked in to see the thing he should've prevented ages ago.

Malfoy had Snape up against the wall, gripping the younger boy's wrists behind his back with one of his hands while the other tried to unbuckle the boy's belt. Severus face was red, his shirt had been ripped open, the buttons strewn across the dusty floor, and there were *actual* tears in his eyes. James was shocked, absolutely shocked, and then he was furious, disgusted, and all he wanted was to rip Malfoy from Snape and beat the living crap out of him, or preferably throw him out of the window.

"Potter?" Malfoy realised that James had walked in first, and he pulled away from Snape. James reached for his wand,

"You sick bastard," he growled.

Malfoy cocked an eyebrow, "Put that wand away, Potter, before you get hurt. This is none of your business."

Snape hadn't moved from his position by the wall, as if he were afraid to turn around, and Malfoy didn't look like he was going anywhere. He put a hand on Snape's wrist and  *jerked* him around, almost violently. Snape wouldn't look up, and he looked so horribly small next to Malfoy that in that moment James hated himself more than anyone else. How could he have every physically hurt Snape? He looked like he would snap in half if anyone touched him too hard.

"Tell him to fuck off, Severus," Malfoy said coolly. Snape hung his head, his greasy hair falling into his eyes and shielding his facial expression. There was a contained anger in Malfoy's eyes though, "*Tell him.*"

Snape opened his mouth, but James was first. He put his wand away, "Does Narcissa know you're a fag, Malfoy?" he asked calmly, and with a detached sort of pleasure watched as the blood drained from the Slytherin's face. It was stupid of him to not see this coming. Slowly Malfoy let go of Snape's wrist and James felt anger burn in his throat when he saw the red mark left behind on the boy's skin. His instincts told him to fight Malfoy right then and there but he knew his priority was to make sure Snape is alright, so he allowed Malfoy to walk to the door.

The blonde paused by James, "If you say a word Potter," he whispered softly. It was a threat, a warning, but Malfoy never finished it, leaving it hanging behind as he left the room, slamming the door shut. Snape flinched at the noise.

James exhaled and immediately made his way to the Slytherin, "Shit, Snape, are you alright?" he asked, reaching for the boy.

"Don't touch me," Snape jerked away from James, and when he looked up his eyes were full of tears and anger. His tattered shirt was hanging off one shoulder, his pale chest and stomach on show. James hated himself for looking over the plains of milky skin and Snape hurriedly wrapped the ruined shirt around himself, shivering, "J-Just get out," he said shakily. He looked a mess. James wanted to pull him into his arms and hold him until he stopped trembling, but he couldn't, because for years he had bullied Snape and the boy had no reason to trust him.

Slowly James took off his cloak, where the last of the snow from outside had melted, and he held it out to Snape. The boy glared at him through his tears, "I don't need your help, Potter," he spat.

"Yes. You do," James said calmly, "Get over your pride and take the cloak before you catch a cold."

Snape ripped the garment from James' hands and wordlessly shrugged it on. He looked like he could drown in it, it was so big on him. He sniffled, clearly trying to keep his tears at bay. James couldn't imagine how bad he was feeling right now.

"Is he going home for Christmas?" he asked softly, "Malfoy, that is." Snape shrugged, looked away. Clearly he couldn't tell if James was trying to make the situation better or worse.

"No."

"You can't stay here with him."

"Don't tell me what I can and can't do," Snape growled.

James knew he had to be confident in his next words, "Snape. Come to my house for the Christmas break."

Snape blinked, clearly caught completely off guard at the words, "W-What?"

"Yeah," James shrugged and put his hands in his pockets, now feeling weirdly shy as he looked away, "my parents have a house in London. Sirius is staying at Remus' for the break so...uh...so we have space and I just thought...my parents are pretty old but they like when I bring friends round-"

"I'm not your friend," Snape said coldly, the trace of tears disappearing from his eyes, "and I don't want your charity, Saint Potter."

"Why do you have to be so difficult?" James sighed in exasperation.

"Because you made my life hell for six years," Snape hissed, "because I *hate* you," his venomous words made James flinch. It was hard, because James suddenly really liked Snape and wanted to be close with him, in what way he was unsure of yet, and to know that the Slytherin still despised him was...painful. But James supposed he deserved it.

"You can't stay here with him," he said softly, "I know you hate me, and I know I was an asshole to you all these years. But I'm trying to change here, I'm trying to fix it. I'm not offering you charity. I'm asking, as a friend, if you'd like to spend Christmas with me," Snape dropped his eyes, "You don't have to if you don't want to. I just don't want you in the castle with that prick."

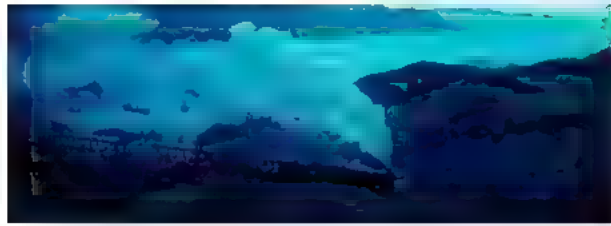
"Since when do you care?" Snape asked, and his voice sounded weirdly broken. James fought the urge to throw himself at the boy and hug him until he was whole again.

"You're important to Lily and she's important to me," James said softly, but that was not the reason he was asking, "I can give you time to think about it-"

"No. I've already made my decision."



## Boys on the Train



"Alright," James said cheerfully as he shoved his bag into the space above the seats, collapsing down next to Snape, grinning.

Who would have thought that James, Sirius, Remus, Peter and Severus fucking Snape would ever share a carriage in the Hogwarts Express. It was a peculiar scene – a tired looking Remus sitting by the doors, a book in his hands, Sirius leaning on him, stretched out over the seats, feet happily propped in Peter's lap. Snape was by the window opposite them and James sat down next to him happily, ignoring the fact that the Slytherin shifted as far away from him as possible, practically pressing himself against the glass. This morning, as the Marauders were saying goodbye to their housemates, he had showed up with a tattered little suitcase in hand, and James' cloak tucked under his arm. He had wordlessly given it back to its owner, and had been silent ever since, trailing behind the Marauders on their way to the train station. Now, as the Hogwarts Express zoomed through the Scottish fields, cloaked in white snow, the Slytherin's expression was unreadable.

"I'm ready for Christmas," James proclaimed. Peter smiled,

"Me too! And I'm ready to go see my ma and open my presents."

"Say hello to your mum from us, would you?" Remus asked, absentmindedly playing with Sirius' hair as he looked through the glass door out onto the little corridor of the train.

"Of course," Peter affirmed quickly. Everyone kept glancing at Snape, the obvious black sheep in the carriage who brought an air of restriction and awkwardness, but the Slytherin's eyes were fixed on the world passing by outside the window and he didn't react to any of them. He looked like he didn't really want to be here. *He only came to get away from Malfoy*, James thought sadly, and then mentally added, *I'll make him have the best Christmas ever, and then he'll be my friend.*

Any attempt to draw Snape into a conversation proved futile so eventually the Marauders just eased into their own little, familiar world. Snape continued looking out of the window for some time, and then he pulled out a potions book and began to read it, completely isolating himself. By the time the old witch came with the Honeydukes express trolley James and Sirius had managed to already get into two light-hearted arguments about Quidditch.

"Anything from the trolley?" the elderly witch asked kindly, pushing said trolley in front of her asked and stopping outside of the carriage the boys were sitting in.

"Yes please!" Sirius sat up excitedly. Snape spared them a glance, but quickly went back to his potions book. The Marauders scrambled for their money, shoving and pushing to get to the trolley.

"What do you want, Sirius?" James called, shoving chocolate frogs into his pockets.

"Pumpkin pasty and chocolate frog!"

"Oi! That's mine-"

“Peter, move your elbow!”

The four boys bickered and playfully shoved each other as they exchanged money with the trolley witch, taking as much sweets as they could and filling their pockets. Sirius flirted with the old woman and got an extra chocolate frog. Only when James realised he was running out of space to put the food did he remember Snape. The boy hadn't moved from his seat.

“Oi, Snape!” James called, and the boy glanced at him through a curtain of greasy hair, “You not getting anything?”

“I don't like sweets,” Snape said curtly, quickly. Guiltily James remembered that the boy was poor and probably didn't have money to blow on things like sweets. Once he would've used that as a weakness and reason to exploit the Slytherin, but now he just felt bad. James himself was pretty well off, so without a second thought he bought an extra chocolate frog.

The trolley lady left the carriage, the door sliding closed behind her, and the Marauders collapsed back into their seats, greedily ripping open the packages their food was in and shoving it in their mouths. The atmosphere calmed down in the carriage and James held out a chocolate frog to Snape. The boy looked at it, then at James, and his look turned into a glare, and James could tell that he hurt his pride again. He was only trying to be nice. Thankfully Remus saved him.

“You should have the chocolate,” he said, his own lap full of sweets, “you look pale. Chocolate helps.”

“I said I don't like sweets,” Snape gritted out from his teeth. James didn't know whether to be annoyed or amused, so he just shook his head and slid back into the conversation with his friends, letting Snape brood. He tried to be patient with the Slytherin and understand his position – he was in a carriage with his old bullies, about to spend Christmas with one of them. It must've been pretty scary.

“Do you want to play exploding snap?” Sirius asked when all the boys were blissed out and finished with their snacks, a pile of rubbish in the corner of their carriage. It was starting to get dark outside.

“No, I think I'll take a nap,” Remus said, stretching his arms over his head.

“Me too,” Peter yawned.

“Looks like Snivellus is way ahead of us,” Sirius snorted, gesturing at the Slytherin. James, who hadn't bothered to look at the boy, now glanced over and saw that Snape had indeed fallen asleep against the window, the potions book loose in his hands, his mouth parted slightly. He looked not like himself when he slept and looking at him made James' stomach twist in a not totally unpleasant way.

“Don't call him Snivellus,” the Gryffindor said quietly. Sirius rolled his eyes,

“Never thought you'd have a soft spot for him, Prongs,” he said, returning to his original position of being stretched out between Peter and Remus. Wormtail bunched up his robes and tucked it under his head, mirroring Snape's position in leaning against the window. The boys closed their eyes, all except James. The Gryffindor was determinedly looking out at the quickly-darkening corridor outside the door, trying to prove to himself that he could not stare at Snape if he wanted to. He drowned himself in the distant sounds of students chattering in other carriages, and of the noise the express made as it raced down the train tracks. His thoughts started to wonder but James honestly wasn't even sure what he was thinking about.

He was broken out of his borderline hypnotic state when Snape suddenly slumped against his shoulder, startling James. The boy looked away from the corridor and found that the carriage was completely dark, the only light coming from the moon outside and the snow, which reflected the pale silver light. James looked down at his rival, who was leaning on him, still dead asleep. The Gryffindor's heart started to pound as he took in his sleeping form. The boy looked small, and vulnerable, and young. James started wondering what Snape would look like if he actually gave two shits about his appearance, and then his hand moved on its own accord. He brushed a strand of Snape's black hair from his face. The boy wrinkled his nose and furrowed his brows but didn't wake up, instead snuggling more into James. He felt freezing, which meant he was probably cold, and James wanted nothing more than to draw him into his lap and hold him until he was all warmed up. *But why, why, why? Why now? Why him?*

*The Marauders*, James remember suddenly, and looked up quickly, heart pounding. He was being weird, touching Snape like that, and he couldn't stand if his friends saw. Peter was asleep though, snoring softly. Sirius was also passed out too, his back to James, head in Remus' lap. The werewolf however was very much awake, his eyes glimmering in the dark as he watched James. The dark haired boy felt a blush rising to his cheeks and he should've pushed Snape off of himself but somehow he couldn't bring himself to wake the Slytherin.

He and Remus looked at each other for a few seconds in complete silence and James knew his friend was judging him, trying to sort out his undoubtedly complicated thoughts. Then an almost hesitant smile appeared on Remus' face, and his expression softened. He glanced at Snape, then at James, and his smile widened. Then, as if nothing happened, he leaned back against his seat and closed his eyes, one of his hands resting on top of Sirius' head. James exhaled and slumped. He had no idea what the little silent exchange with Remus had been but James assumed that for some reason the other boy didn't mind the new way James was treating Snape. So that made one out of three.

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Severus tried not to think about the fact that he had woken up cuddled up into Potter's side. He tried not to think about the fact that Potter's arm had been around his shoulders, keeping him close. He tried not to think about the fact that his first instinct was to press himself closer to the warm boy. He really, really tried not to think about that. *He was asleep, he didn't know what he was doing*, Sev told himself over and over as the Gryffindors in his carriage woke up slowly. Potter of course had no idea what position he had been in with Severus since the boy had extracted himself from his arms the second he woke up, absolutely freaked out, and stayed as far away from him as the carriage allowed him. Now he could barely look at the Gryffindor without blushing. His aims for the next week and a bit were to make sure he didn't do anything he'd regret later in front of Potter – like blurt out something stupid.

Sev took the first chance he got to leave and went to the bathroom to change from his tattered Hogwarts robes into an only slightly less tattered black jumper and old trousers. He looked a bit like he was wearing bin bags as he walked out, but he didn't care. By the time he returned to the carriage, where the Marauders were finishing getting dressed, still sleepy and groggy, the Hogwarts Express had entered London. Lights broke through the darkness outside as the city rose about them.

"We'll be at King's Cross in fifteen minutes," Lupin said, picking up the rubbish the boys had left in the corner, bleary eyed. Sev nodded, bit his lip, and felt Potter's eyes on him.

"What?" he asked, because Potter was just kind of staring at him. The Gryffindor cleared his throat and looked away.

“Nothing.”

Severus self-consciously hugged himself. He didn't understand how Pettigrew did this all the time; spent so much time with three good looking guys like Lupin, Black and Potter. It was making Sev more insecure than normal, and made him want to fix his clothes and hair, even though he had never been one to care about things like that before. Sev was eager to get off the train when it rolled onto platform 9 ¾; he could barely handle Potter alone, much less with all his friends. They all piled off the train with the crowd of other overexcited children and teenagers, shoving and shouting and tripping each other up and suddenly Severus found himself outside of the train's warmth and on the freezing platform, packed with eager parents and smoke coming off of the Express. Just when the Slytherin thought his level of discomfort couldn't rise anymore, it was time to say goodbyes.

“I'll see you guys in two weeks,” Potter said cheerfully, throwing his arms around Black, who laughed and slapped him heartily on the back. Sev stood on the foggy platform, trying not to shiver and awkwardly watching children reunite with their parents, feeling like a sore thumb sticking out as Potter also hugged Lupin and Pettigrew.

“I...uh,” Lupin looked at Sev awkwardly, “See you later Snape.”

“Yeah. Bye.” Severus replied, though even that was hard to get through his throat. Pettigrew gave him a long look, and Black ignored him completely, throwing his arms around his friends' shoulders and walking off with them, talking obnoxiously loudly.

“Right, should we go home?” Potter asked cheerfully. Severus honestly contemplated hopping back onto the Hogwarts Express.

“Are your parents not here?” he asked. Potter shrugged.

“They're working late today, but they sent me money for a taxi. I live closeby,” to Sev's surprise the Gryffindor leaned down and picked up the Slytherin's bag, as if the boy was a girl or worse, his *boyfriend*, “Come on!” he called, clearly not realising the impact of his actions, and Severus had to race after him to not lose him in the smoke generated by the train that he should've gotten back on.

## The Question of the Mattress



"*This* is your house?" Severus asked in disbelief, gazing up at the beautiful building rising in front of him. They were in Covent Garden and the taxi had left them outside this stunning place. It was fully detached from its neighbours, unlike the normal London houses, and had two floors and an attic. Made of ruddy red brick with a black, slanted roof it was now coated with snow as if it was an iced cake. It was surrounded by an intricate black fence, and a little stone path led to the front door through the snowy garden. It was absolutely beautiful and the complete opposite of the shack Sev lived in at Spinner's End.

"Yeah," Potter said, clearly not seeing the surprise and awe on Sev's face. The boy was suddenly glad for the cover of the night because the darkness made him more comfortable. He knew he didn't belong in this gorgeous house with this gorgeous boy. Not that either of them were his, they were just bait, dangled in front of them so Severus could fulfil some kind of plan that Potter must have had. He hesitantly followed the boy through the gate and down the pathway and because the Gryffindor was still holding both of their bags Sev's hands were clutching onto the end of his tattered cloak.

He stood behind Potter like a shadow as the boy fished out a key from his nice, expensive cloak and opened the front door, "There's spells on the place, so it's totally safe," the boy said casually. Sev tensed,

"Safe from what?"

Potter shrugged as he opened the door, "The One Who Shall Not Be Named and his followers," he said and as Severus walked into the hallway he wondered if Potter *knew*. Is this why he was being nice? Because Lily employed him to try to steer Severus off the Deatheater path? But how would she know...?

Sev's glum thoughts were cut short when Potter flicked the light on and closed the door, "Take your shoes off," he said, but Severus couldn't move, just looking at the hallway.

It wasn't anything special – the floor laden with a navy carpet, dark doorways leading to other parts of the house, a mirror on the wall, a clock on which news events appeared at different times – traffic, car crashes, political announcements in other countries. A staircase led to the upper floor and there were family pictures on the top of the shoe shelf. It wasn't anything special, but it was all



Severus had wanted all his life. His stomach twisted in pain as he looked at the beautiful home.

“Hey,” Potter clicked his fingers in front of Sev’s face, “You alright?”

“Fine,” Severus said quickly, snarkily, as he shoved off his falling apart boots. Potter nodded as if he didn’t quite believe him.

“My room’s upstairs, come on.”

As Severus silently followed Potter up the dark staircase he couldn’t help but wonder what the next two weeks would be like, and if they would be as tense as this. Potter looked perfectly at ease in the house, but it made sense since it was his home. Severus on the other hand felt like an alien as the Gryffindor opened a door on the dark upstairs hallway and ushered Sev in, flicking the light on.

Potter’s bedroom exactly what Severus expected. There was the faint smell of cleaning products in the air and the covers on the double bed, some kind of purple one of a Quidditch team Snape didn’t know, were clearly freshly washed. The walls had multiple moving posters on them – some gross teenage boy ones of witches in underwear blowing kisses, and other ones of broom models and popular bands. There was a mahogany wardrobe in the room, a desk, a bookshelf, and several trophies from Quidditch at school.

“Uh...welcome to my room?” Potter asked with a charming chuckle, running a hand through his ruffled hair. Severus fought the urge to roll his eyes – Potter looked like he was a teen star out of a goddamn movie.

“There’s no mattress,” Severus said, gesturing at the empty floor, “or am I sleeping on the couch?”

Potter flushed a little and looked away, “Yeah...uh...about that. My parents are very homey and when Sirius stays over we just share a bed so...”

Severus’ eyes widened and his heart started pounding, “*What?*” he looked over at the double bed, “I am *not* sleeping with you.”

“It’s not that bad, the bed’s big enough so it’s comfortable when me and Sirius sleep together-“

“Do you suck his dick while you’re at it?” Snape interjected, angry. Potter rolled his eyes,

“You could be nicer you know, it wouldn’t kill you.”

“Whatever,” Snape grumbled, “Can I take a shower or do I have to share that with you too?” he knew he was being rude and that he should be more grateful, but he didn’t know how else to keep the distance between him and Potter.

“I didn’t even know you showered,” Potter fired back, chucking his bag on the bed and starting to unpack, “The bathroom’s down the hall, door on the left. Wash your hair for fuck’s sake, I want you to be presentable for my parents.”

“Don’t tell me what to do,” Severus grumbled half-heartedly but caught the towel that Potter threw at him. He was glad to be out of the Gryffindor’s presence and alone with his thoughts as he escaped into the corridor. The bathroom was as nice as the rest of the house with a big bath. Sev’s bathroom in Spinner’s end was dark, cramped, infested with bugs and the water in the shower was never warm.

The boy stripped off his clothes and, avoiding looking at the mirror on the wall, stepped into the bathtub, pulling the curtains closed. When the water hit his body Severus flinched – it was warm,

pleasant, but the boy didn't know how to deal with that. He really didn't trust Potter and didn't know how to take his kindness...there had to be a prank at way, something that would crush Sev so badly he'd never get up again. He knew the Gryffindors, knew how cruel they could be. Even remembering that incident when Potter flipped him upside down and revealed his underwear to half the school made him flush, even though it had been almost two years ago.

Severus stepped under the water and closed his eyes, trying to get his bearings. He was here, in Potter's house, for Christmas. He needed a plan, needed to make sure he wasn't swept away by Potter's good looks and charming words. The boy was an asshole through and through and right now he was just pretending to be nice. And what was the whole thing of sleeping together about? Sev was embarrassed just remembering the nights before, when he had had Potter's cloak with him. The blood rushed to his face as he remembered how he had curled up in his bed in the Slytherin tower, pressing his face into Potter's cloak and losing himself in the smell of the other boy, the smell that that somehow comforted him, chasing away the reek of Malfoy that seemed to linger around Severus.

The boy brushed his wet hair from his face and sighed before opening his eyes again. They landed on a bottle of shampoo and Severus' face twisted in disgust. He had two options – either not wash his hair and annoy Potter, which seemed like a brilliant idea, or wash his hair and have Potter laugh at him because his hair was horrible when it was washed. Sev sighed and reached for the bottle. He didn't want to meet Potter's parents with greasy hair.

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The shower shut off and James re-arranged the pillows on his bed for the third time in the last ten minutes. He stepped back, looked at the pillows, sighed and re-arranged them again. He was nervous, he desperately wanted Snape to be comfortable in his bed. He himself was anxious about the night and sharing at the bed with his ex-rival. He imagined the warmth of Snape's body next to him and it made him pause with a pillow in his hands. It was made worse by the fact that his parents were staying at his aunt's house in Brighton for the night, since they were there to pick up family for Christmas. Subconsciously James' hands tightened on the pillow as he imagined how easy it would be to pull Snape into his arms...

"Potter!"

The shout came from Snape, who was still in the bathroom, "What?!" James called back.

"I forgot my pyjamas! Can you bring them?!"

James almost fell over his own two feet in his eagerness to get to Snape's bag. He threw it open and winced at the ugly, tattered clothes inside. They were all black and James didn't even know how to distinguish his normal clothes from his pyjamas. He gave up after a few seconds and instead turned to his wardrobe and pulled out one of his own t-shirts, a nice green one, and some sweatpants. He padded into the hallway and knocked on the bathroom door.

It opened, and Snape only shoved his hand out instead of even looking out, "I couldn't find your pj's," James warned, placing his own clothes into Snape's hand, "So they're--"

Before he could finish his sentence the door slammed shut. James sighed and rested his forehead against the door in frustration. He just wanted *something* from Snape – a smile, a thankyou, a little inclination that the boy might be warming up to the Gryffindor. He got nothing.

"My parent's went to Brighton to pick up my cousins, so they'll be back really late. They told us not to wait up," James said. There was no response so disheartened the boy returned to his

bedroom. He shrugged into his own pj's and sat on his bed and waited...and waited...and waited, but Snape wasn't coming into the bedroom. James wanted to shout to him, to ask if he fell into the toilet or something, but he didn't want to seem like he cared. Not knowing how, somehow the Gryffindor fell asleep.

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James woke up, groggy, to the darkness of his bedroom. The smell of the familiar detergent his mother used on his sheets calmed him. He smiled to himself, remembering he was home, and turned in his comfortable bed. His eyes widened suddenly when he saw Snape laying right next to him, so close than he was almost touching James. The Gryffindor had forgotten about him for a second, but his presence wasn't what shocked James into being fully awake.

Snape's hair was soft and fluffy, and it was wavy and dark against the pillow, like a black halo. Somehow James thought Snape's hair would be straight and the waves made him look...softer. He looked young and peaceful, eyes closed, eyelashes dark against his white cheeks. Even his hooked nose seemed less sharp than it usually was, and his pale pink lips were weirdly plump. He was wearing the clothes James gave to him – the green t-shirt was too big on him, the sleeves almost reaching his elbows, his thin arms sticking out, the neckline revealing his protruding collarbones. The green was flattering on him, it didn't wash him out like the black he always wore did. The covers bunched around his waist. He looked so different, he looked...

James licked his lips nervously and shifted closer. He lifted a shaky hand and nervously placed it on Snape's cheek. He didn't know what he was doing, he was usually never anxious in situations like this. He moved closer, so that his legs pressed against Snape's under the covers. The Slytherin was breathing deeply but softly, asleep.

James pressed their foreheads together, his heart pounding. Snape smelled like James' shampoo and body wash, with an underlying hint that was purely him. James was shaking, something seemed to take over his body and he didn't know what he was doing, didn't know what he wanted, except that he had the desire to hold the boy next to him in his arms. Snape's skin was cold under his palm, and James had the unbearable desire to warm him up. His eyes slid down to Snape's mouth, and James brushed their noses together subconsciously. Snape's brows furrowed in his sleep but he didn't wake. James' fingers slid into his wavy hair – it was soft.

*I want to kiss him*, James thought.

The realisation made him jerk away from Snape suddenly, and his heart pounded so fast that he thought it might actually break through his chest. He wanted to be sick. He loved Lily! He had always loved Lily! So why...why...James couldn't even look at Snape anymore. He rolled over onto his side, eyes fixed on his dark room. He didn't sleep until the sun started coming up, listening distractedly to Snape breathing.

## The Winter Mornings



Severus woke up to something he had never woken up to before – winter sunlight streaming in through a window, a warm room, the sound of voices and laughter downstairs, and a warm arm around his waist. In his dormroom at Hogwarts Sev always got up very early in order to get away from his oppressive roommates and to avoid Lucius in the common room, and back at Spinner's End in the summer he would be roused by his father's shouting about how he was a lazy shit almost every morning. This was different.

This was terrifying.

Severus held his breath, staring at the wall. He could hear multiple people downstairs and there was the delicious smell of bacon wafting up, but that wasn't what the Slytherin was thinking about right now. What he was thinking about was the tanned, muscular arm around his waist, an arm belonging to Potter. Sev started feeling light-headed because he wasn't breathing, and his heart pounded so hard he was scared he might actually have a heart attack. *Why* in the hell was Potter hugging him?! Sev could feel the boy's breath against the back of his neck, and the warmth radiating off him made Severus want to snuggle closer.

Potter was clearly still sleeping so incredibly slowly Severus twisted in his arms. The Gryffindor didn't pull away so when Sev came face to face with him the boy was still holding him. Sev didn't know how to react, he just kind of looked at Potter's face. The boy was handsome as ever, his glasses folded on the bedside table. Severus just wanted to cuddle into him, just for a second, so desperately. He yearned for affection badly, and that's what pushed him to snuggle closer to Potter, to slip his arm underneath the boy's and hold onto him as he pressed his face into the Gryffindor's chest. Only for a second.

To Sev's shock the Gryffindor's arms subconsciously tightened around him, trapping him. Severus started panicking because he couldn't pull away now, he was assaulted by Potter's warmth and his amazing smell and Sev just wanted to melt into him and stay there forever. His eyes fluttered shut

and he exhaled and subjected himself to his fate...and then Potter woke up.

Severus had to pretend to sleep because he didn't have an excuse for the position they were in. As Potter shifted awake Sev kept his eyes closed and forced himself not to tense up. He felt the Gryffindor pause as he undoubtedly became aware of how close he and the Slytherin were, and Sev prepared himself for the shove he knew he was going to get, and the disgusted shouting that would follow. What he got instead was a gentle, hesitant hand that reached up and softly brushed Severus' hair from his forehead and tucked it behind his ear. The Slytherin felt like he was going to die. He had no idea what was happening and what Potter was doing, and he was *scared*. But all Potter did was allow his hand to slide to Slytherin's cheek and he stroked it gently for a second, before letting go of Severus all together and rolling out of bed.

Sev remained laying where he was, face pressed into the pillow, and tried to get his erratic heartbeat under control. What did Potter just do? *Why* did he do that? Did he know that Severus was awake and was just messing with him?

"Oi, Snape!" Potter slapped his hand onto Sev's shoulder, making the boy jolt at the sudden contact. He looked up, surprised, and saw the grinning Gryffindor. His heart wouldn't calm down, "Morning," Potter said casually, as if he hadn't just done...*that*.

"M-Morning," Sev said, then cleared his throat and hoped Potter hadn't noticed its shakiness. The Gryffindor turned to the closet and threw it open, pulling out a shirt and a jumper and throwing the latter directly in Severus' face.

"Get dressed, my parents are downstairs."

"I have my own clothes," Severus grumbled, sitting up.

"Your clothes are ugly and old," Potter deadpanned, "I'm not letting you wear them in front of my family because they'll think you're homeless."

Sev winced, "Wow. You're so nice, Potter."

The Gryffindor smiled, "I like your hair like that."

Severus flinched and dropped his eyes and his heart, which had finally managed to calm down, started pounding again. He pulled his t-shirt off and hurriedly tugged Potter's jumper on in its place, just so he could busy himself with something and try and hide the blush dusting his cheeks from the other boy.

They finished getting dressed in silence and then took turns going to the bathroom to brush their teeth. When Severus looked at himself in the mirror he winced – his hair was messy as well as wavy from the night's sleep so with distaste the boy pulled it back, tying it in a bun at the nape of his neck. Despite the new hairstyle and the comfortable grey sweater that Potter had given him, he was still ugly. He looked away from his reflection in disgust.

Severus anxiously followed Potter downstairs, towards the sound of the family talking and the smell of breakfast cooking. He was nervous and uncomfortable and didn't know how to act, so he trailed close behind the Gryffindor, like a shadow. He almost reached out and grabbed the boy's shirt when they walked into the beautiful, spacious kitchen, where three people were lounging around the dining table, but he stopped himself.

"Good morning sleepyhead!" a woman startlingly older than what Sev expected Potter's mother to be walked over to the Gryffindor with open arms. She was short, plump, her black hair streaked



with grey. Potter was grinning as he fell into the woman's arms and allowed her to kiss his cheeks and ruffle his hair. A tall man stood up from the table, his salt and pepper hair paired with familiar sparkling hazel eyes, making him, undoubtedly, Potter's father.

Severus pulled his sleeves over his hands, feeling awkward as he looked at the last person at the table. The girl looked maybe a year older than Sev and Potter and was grinning at the Gryffindor. Her hair was dyed a neon blue, and she was dressed head to toe in blue with stripy, knee high socks and a short skirt despite the fact it was winter.

"Jamie!" she said happily when the boy finished saying hello to his parents.

"Hey, Asadora," Potter mirrored her mischievous grin as the two of them embraced, squeezing each other and giggling like gremlins.

"And you must be Severus!" Mrs Potter cooed, coming over to the Slytherin, who flinched when she suddenly put her arms around him, enveloping him into a warm hug, "It's fantastic to finally meet you, James has said so many lovely things about you."

"H-He has?" Sev blinked in surprise as the woman pulled away.

"Naturally," Mr Potter nodded, coming over to shake Severus hand. Honestly the Slytherin was a little overwhelmed, and he probably looked like a deer caught in some headlights.

"Sna-, uh, Sev," Potter corrected himself quickly, and Severus' nickname sounded weird coming out of his mouth. Only Lily called him Sev, "this is my cousin, Asadora," the boy introduced, slinging a casual arm around his cousin's shoulders. The girl's grin widened and she confidently stuck out her hand.

"Pleasure to meet you," she said, looking at Sev in a way that made her look like she was scheming something. Nervously the boy shook her hand.

"Likewise," he mumbled.

"Asa is super smart," Potter said proudly, "she's one of the only five non-Japanese students accepted into the Mahoutokoro School of Magic."

"Oh," Sev said. Asadora swatted at Potter playfully.

"Oh shush, it's not a big deal."

"Of course it is, sweetheart," Mrs Potter interjected, "But no more chatter, sit, children, and eat."

"I'm off to work, darling," Mr Potter kissed his wife openly, in front of the teenagers, on the lips. Potter and his cousin snickered but Severus averted his eyes, embarrassed. He wasn't used to public displays of affection and instead chose to look at the table, laden with food – eggs, bacon, toast, beans, veggies. It was so much food that Sev felt sick just looking at it, "Bye kids," Mr Potter gave the teenagers a little wave, picked up his briefcase and disappeared out of the kitchen. Severus perched onto a chair and looked at his plate.

"Eat up, darlings," Mrs Potter said warmly. The kitchen filled with easy going chatter as Potter, his mother and Amadora started catching up with each other while they reached for food, filling up their plates. Severus placed a slice of bacon on his, next to a piece of toast. Silently he started nibbling on the bread.

"Oi," Potter leaned in close after a moment while his mother and Amadora lost themselves in

conversation, distracted, "Eat something or you'll disappear."

"Not hungry," Sev muttered.

"My mum cooked for you," Potter huffed and pinched Sev's thigh under the table, playfully, "Eat."

Severus glared at him in annoyance and deliberately bit into his toast with anger.

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"You boys get some fresh air," James' mum said as he and Snape pulled on their shoes after breakfast, "go for a walk. James show him all the nice places in the neighbourhood."

"Yes mum," James said fondly. Snape was silent, the same way he had been most of the morning as he pulled on his jacket. Whenever James looked at him he remembered how angelic the Slytherin had been in the morning, all snuggled up in the Gryffindor's arms. James had wanted to kiss him so badly then, but he had somehow managed to stop himself. He was still trying to accept this new onslaught of emotions he was feeling towards the boy he once hated, "We'll be going then," James said, "Bye Asa, you lazy girl!" he shouted up the stairs, but got no response from his cousin who had barricaded herself in the spare room.

"You can't be going out like that, Severus!" Mrs Potter said suddenly, "Where's your hat? And your scarf?"

James looked over at Snape, who was just in his tattered old jacket, looking confused, "I...uh...I forgot them?" he offered.

"Oh silly boy," Mrs Potter said fondly and pulled her wand from her belt. With a gentle wave and a gentle spell a navy hat and a matching scarf floated down the stairs and into Snape's hands. The Slytherin thanked her meekly and shoved the clothes on. James tried to hide his smile at seeing Snape with a pompom on his head, "Now you can go boys."

"Bye mum," James said.

"Bye Mrs Potter," Snape mumbled.

Together they walked out into the cold winter morning. The ground was caked with fresh snow but the sky above was clear and blue, the sun shining down cheerfully. Snape's eyes narrowed at the brightness and he shoved his chin into his chest to shield his exposed cheeks from the biting wind. He started walking, fast, without waiting for James.

"You don't have to run," the Gryffindor teased, following after him. Snape didn't reply, shoving his hands into his pockets. James frowned and hurried after him but the Slytherin seemed set on putting some distance between him and the Gryffindor, "Oi, wait up for fuck's sake."

"I don't want to talk to you, we're not friends," Snape barked, turning a random corner. The streets were empty in this part of the neighbourhood, no cars passing by.

"You don't even know where you're going," James laughed. Snape ignored him again and almost ran between two buildings in his haste to get away, and the Gryffindor happily followed him. The two boys found themselves entering a small park, James a little way behind the Slytherin, "How long are you going to try to avoid me?"

"Fuck off, Potter," the Slytherin snapped. James frowned, a little annoyed at Snape's attitude. He had been nothing but nice to him for ages, the least the Slytherin could do was stop swearing at

him.

"You don't have to be so rude all the time," he said.

"And you don't have to bother me all the time," Snape barked, his cheeks and tip of his hooked nose flushed from the cold. James grabbed his wrist and forced the boy to stop walking abruptly, jerking him backwards.

"What the fuck?!" Snape growled, trying to free his wrist, but James was a lot stronger and easily pulled the Slytherin to him despite his struggling.

"You were rude all of last night," James said angrily, "and this morning you've been all weird and quiet and you practically didn't eat anything--"

"That's not your concern," Snape snapped, and tried to pull his wrist free again. His dark eyes were stormy.

"What's your problem?" James demanded.

"Do you know how lucky you are?" Snape spat, surprising James by the sudden venom in his voice, "You have an amazing home and amazing parents and amazing *everything*, and yet you're still such a fucking prick."

"I've been nothing but nice to you recently," James snapped.

"Yeah, recently," Snape ripped his wrist free and stumbled away from the Gryffindor, "doesn't make up for the years in which you made me miserable."

"I'm not the one who called Lily a mudblood," James hissed, aware that it was a shitty defence. He was just so used to fighting Snape that it was natural to argue back.

"I wouldn't have called her that if you hadn't pulled my pants down," Snape retaliated.

"Yeah, you would've, because you're a shit person."

"I'm only a shit person because of all the bullshit that happened to me," Snape yelled, and his cheeks were flushed by more than just the cold now, "Because my father hates me and my mother's losing her marbles and my home is a fucking shack and...a-and...", his voice faltered and James swore he saw tears shining in the Slytherin's eyes before he turned away. James didn't know what to say. Snape was right, "you're so fucking lucky."

"Hey," the Gryffindor said softly, reaching up to touch the Slytherin's back, but then thought better of it and dropped his hand, "I'm sorry."

The next thing Snape said made his blood run cold though, and chased away any regrets that James was having, "Why did you touch me like that this morning?" Snape's voice was full of disgust. James flinched, felt his stomach twist in anxiety. *Oh Merlin, oh Merlin...*

"I was half asleep. I thought you were Lily," James blurted, because it was the first thing that came to his head. He saw Snape's shoulders slump, and without another word the boy continued walking. James just let him, feeling disheartened.

## Dear Lily...



Severus avoided returning to the Potters' as long as he physically could. He walked around the park in the cold until his skin tingled and he was shaking, watching more and more of his own tracks appear in the snow. Potter hadn't followed him after their fight, but Sev hadn't expected him to. He honestly just wanted to go back home, except he didn't have a home – he didn't miss Hogwarts and he definitely didn't miss Spinner's End. So instead he stayed curled up on a bench, crying for hours like the pathetic idiot he was, until the sky started going dark. Potter confirming Sev's fear that he had touched him in the morning for some alternative reason rather than because it was Severus had made him upset, even though he knew he shouldn't be. He knew Potter's feelings towards Lily so why did he give himself hope that they would change?

Asadora found him, which surprised Severus. He saw her walking from a mile away, trekking through the empty park, electric blue against the white snow. He hadn't expected for anyone to care about him, or come get him. At Spinner's End he usually stayed out way after dark, avoiding his house for as long as he could. He didn't know how to react when Asadora came and sat down on the opposite end of the bench. Severus just hoped that his eyes weren't red and it wasn't obvious that he had cried.

"You alright? Auntie's getting worried about you," Asadora asked after a moment of silence. Sev didn't know what to reply, "Lover's quarrel?" the girl teased, clearly trying to lighten the mood. Severus glared at her.

"No. We're not together."

Asa snorted as if that amused her, "Is that so?" she asked, looking out into the distance. Severus wanted her to go and leave him alone to mop. Angrily he wiped the last of his tears from his cheeks, "It sure seemed like you guys were pretty close."

"I hate him," Sev blurted, ignoring whatever story Potter sold his family, "and he hates me. I don't know what he's trying to do here."

"He doesn't hate you," Asadora said immediately. Severus didn't want to be having this conversation – of course the girl was going to defend her cousin.

"Yes he does," Sev said spitefully, "he's fought me since our first year at Hogwarts, made my life hell over a stupid girl and I-," he paused, getting a hold of himself, and exhaled, "Nevermind."

Asadora was quiet for a second and Sev could see her neon hair out of the corner of his eye, "I don't think he hates you," she said after a moment, careful and hesitant, "Not with the way he looks at you."

Sev was getting a headache, "Enlighten me *how* does he look at me?"

"It's complicated to explain," Asadora stood up and dusted snow off her lap, "Come on, it's getting dark, you look freezing, dinner's almost ready and it's movie night."

"Movie night?" Severus questioned. The girl shrugged,

"Well, it's just me and Jamie sitting downstairs and watching movies. I think it'd be really nice if you joined us."

Severus' eyes narrowed but the idea of sitting in the warmth of the Potter house and watching movies seemed like an upgrade from this freezing cold bench. Besides, Sev never got to watch TV like a normal kid. He mournfully looked out at the snowy field and with a sigh he stood up, shoving his cold hands into his pockets. Asadora grinned and without his permission she slid her arm through his,

"Not everyone's against you," she said, pulling the grumpy boy along with her, back towards the house, "I don't know what you and Jamie fought about but I can tell he's pretty upset too. He's walking around the house looking like a kicked puppy," when Severus didn't reply she glanced at him and smiled, "I can see why he likes you. You're cute."

Severus blushed and ducked his head, "He doesn't like me," he spat, *and he definitely doesn't think I'm cute*, he added mentally.

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James was giving Snape the silent treatment, but honestly he wasn't sure if it was working since the Slytherin seemed to be giving him the silent treatment right back. The usually enjoyable movie night at the Potter house was now tense thanks to their earlier argument, and James hated it.

Asadora sat between the two boys, the Gryffindor barely even watching the new horror movie, *Carrie*, playing on the screen, instead glancing through the dark living room at the other end of the long couch, where Snape was lounging. He had his knees drawn to his chest, a blanket thrown over him, looking all cute and pissed off and *Merlin* James just wanted to grab him and hold him and...

He exhaled in frustration, re-arranging his pants to try and hide the inclination of an erection that he was starting to get (and deny that it was there because he was *not* getting hard for Snape) and tried to focus on the horror movie instead. Asadora's loud munching on popcorn helped distract him from the Slytherin. For what seemed like the hundredth time in the past day James wondered about Lily. Whenever he used to think about the fiery haired girl warmth would trickle into his stomach, and he'd smile, and the majority of his time he spent fantasising about her. But recently, for the past few weeks, it was Snape who took up most of his mind – what was he doing? What was he thinking? Even now James' eyes seemed to slide to the other boy on his own accord.

He looked away from the screen, where the main action was taking place and everyone was getting annihilated by *Carrie*, and gazed at Snape. James' heart jumped when he saw that the Slytherin was already looking at him. Instead of glancing away the Gryffindor kept his cool and smirked at him, winking. In reply to the flirtatious action Snape's eyes narrowed and he glared at his 'friend.' Asa seemed unaware of this little exchange as she anxiously watched the movie, gasping at every gruesome death.

The credits started rolling faster than James anticipated and Asadora stood up, yawning and stretching her arms over her head, her earlier horror at the movie completely gone, "Well then, goodnight boys," she said, and padded out of the living room without further ado. Snape threw



back his blanket and practically ran after her, as if he was afraid of staying alone in the room with James alone, even though they'd be sleeping in the same bed in a few minutes. James exhaled and rubbed a hand down his face. He wanted to follow Snape but he knew the boy needed space, just seeing him come back from the park, his nose and cheeks flushed, shaking from the cold, had made James upset.

Almost by chance the Gryffindor's eyes landed on a stack of envelopes on a cupboard on the other side of the room. The boy climbed off the couch and walked over, picking one envelope up. He bit his lip and exhaled. He knew what he had to do. He opened the cupboard and pulled out a sheet of paper and a pen. James always went with the flow, he didn't over think things, he followed his heart more than his head. Now the words that had circled his head for weeks now spilled onto the paper with terrifying ease.

*Dear Lily,*

*How's your Christmas going? I hope you're having fun. I know we've only been apart for 2 days but I feel like I need to speak to you. It's about Snape. I think i have feelings for him and that's your fault. If it wasn't for your stupid idea of us becoming friends then this would've never happened, and now im following around a boy that hates me. i hope you don't hate me for this too but i cant continue pretending that i have feelings for you when all i can think about is him.*

~~*I think i might be in love with him.*~~

*i hope we can still be best friends and that you can help me with this.*

*Lots of love,*

*James.*

He looked at the paper for a while, until his hands started trembling. He couldn't send it, couldn't break it to Lily like that. He'd have to tell her face to face. Dejected James picked up another piece of paper and tried again.

*Dear Lily,*

*How's your Christmas going? I hope you're having fun. I know we've only been apart for two days but I feel like I haven't seen you in ages. I miss you. I did it – I made friends with Snape, so now you have to go to the new year's ball with me. Can't wait to see you.*

*Lots of love,*

*James.*

A little pleased the boy re-wrote the letter so it was neater, shoved it into an envelope and walked out into his cold garden, heading towards the small owlery in the back, leaving his original letter and the draft on the cupboard, forgotten.

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Severus wanted to fall asleep before Potter came up so he didn't have to deal with any questions, but he was more awake than ever. He laid in bed and stared at the window, where the night was icy and cold, and the moon was a silver crescent in the sky. He saw an owl flutter past the frosted glass, clutching a letter, and he briefly wondered who was sending out messages at this time. Mindlessly he picked at the loose thread on his pillow, his gaze flickering from the window to the wall he was facing. His breathing was punctuated by common sighs as he found that he was unable

to find a comfortable position, or go to sleep.

He tensed when he heard the door open and Potter walk into the dark room, but he didn't pretend to be asleep. There was no point. He just laid there and kept his eyes firmly on the wall, listening as Potter changed into his pj's, feeling the shift of the mattress as the boy laid down. Severus inhaled sharply when Potter's arm slid around his waist with no question and no hesitations.

"Potter what the-," Sev started but shut up when Potter causally dragged him towards him, as if the Slytherin weighed nothing, and enveloped him in his arms, "What are you doing?!" Snape demanded angrily, though he couldn't see Potter's face, "I don't have time for this Potter."

"James," the boy retaliated, in a soft, hushed voice that made Sev still. He was keeping the Slytherin close, preventing him from squirming away, "Stop with the Potter thing. Just call me James."

"Let go, *James*," Severus said pointedly, digging his fingers into James' muscular arm. The boy's response was to snuggle more into Sev's back.

"Nope," he said happily, bending his legs so they fitted perfectly against the back of Sev's, "Just go to sleep and let me cuddle you. I'm a cuddler."

Severus exhaled in annoyance, subjecting himself to this kind of pleasurable torture. He started dejectedly at the wall and eventually relaxed slightly in James' arms.

"Goodnight Severus," James said sleepily, out of nowhere. Sev squeezed his eyes shut as the Gryffindor's arms tightened around his waist. He liked it, he liked all of it. He liked the cuddling, and the way James said his first name, and this wasn't like anything Sev had ever experienced before. But he knew the sad truth of James' words and actions.

"I'm not Lily, James," he whispered into the darkness of the room. The Gryffindor's only response was his even, deep, calm breathing.

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Life continued surprisingly peacefully for a few days after that, almost like Sev and James going on first-name basis was an ice breaker. For four days everything was almost too good to be true. The boys woke up in the morning and had breakfast downstairs with the lovely Mrs Potter and Asadora, then they'd spend the morning at the park. James persuaded Severus, after a few days, to build a snowman with him. It turned out wonky but thanks to James' magic it came to life and started dancing around, which was pretty entertaining. Between snowball fights with Asadora, reading, watching movies, running errands for Mrs Potter and collectively doing chores Sev had little time to ponder about his otherwise sad life. He allowed this Christmas break to be like a bubble around him, isolating him from his normal drab days. He, James and Asa went around London too, mostly to Trafalgar Square to look at the Christmas trees and to Chinatown, where the days went by as if it wasn't even Christmas. It was nice, it was really, really nice. Lilly wrote to Sev, asking how he was finding the holiday, and he told her the truth – that Christmas was magical and that even James was unlike himself.

The nights were different. Every single time James would wrap Severus up in his arms as if they were some kind of *couple* or something, and he'd hold him and fall asleep like that. Sev laid awake for the most part, listening to the Gryffindor breathe and marvelling at the warmth and strength in his arms. He found himself looking forward to the nights. It wouldn't be like this when they went back to Hogwarts, and that made the Slytherin depressed. He wanted to stay here, in London, forever. But he knew that all this – James' little touches and his warm smiles and his hugs at night

and kind words – were dangerous. Despite knowing that this all could've been an elaborate prank, Severus found himself trusting James.

And then Severus got sick.

He woke up a week before Christmas day, feeling like he was on fire. His throat was sore, his head throbbed with pain, and his eyes ached whenever he tried to open them. His vision was blurry around the edges and he was shaking despite burning up.

"It's because you boys roll around in snow all the time," Mrs Potter scoffed, checking Severus' temperature that morning and leaning over him like a mother hen. James and Asadora, still in their pyjamas, loomed above her, looking worried, "You have a fever Severus, sweetie. This is what you get for being foolish boys," she shook her head and sighed, "I just hope you get better soon darling."

"Sorry for causing trouble," Sev mumbled, closing his eyes because it hurt to keep them open. Mrs Potter sighed good-heartedly and pulled the covers up over his body, tucking them under his chin. Severus let out a cough that made his lungs feel as if he had swallowed acid.

"Isn't there a spell you can do, mum?" James asked.

"I'm not a doctor," Mrs Potter stood up from where she had been perched on the bed, "Asadora, darling, make him tea and then you and James can prepare some chicken soup. Unfortunately I'm on my way to Manchester to pick up the rest of the family for Christmas since your father's at work."

"Alright auntie," Asadora said, resuming the woman's place on the edge of the bed. She squeezed Sev's leg in comfort and he tried to smile at her because he genuinely liked the eccentric girl, but his face muscles wouldn't work properly.

James towered over him and gently brushed Severus' hair from his forehead, before placing his cool hand on the skin there, "You're going to be brand new in a few days," he said comfortingly.

Severus slept after that, because he felt like actual shit. When he woke up it was past midday and it was snowing heavily outside. Asadora came in and gave him some nice hot tea that made Sev feel better for a moment but then he wanted to collapse again. He returned to the warm comfort of sleep and when he woke up again it was considerably later and his nerves felt like they were on fire, his brain pulsating painfully behind his eyes.

It was James who woke him. He sat on a chair by the bed, a bowl in his lap, "I made you some chicken soup," he said gently, and even looking up at him hurt Sev's brain, "I'm afraid it's probably not very good but I think it'll make you feel better."

"I don't want it," Severus grumbled, pressing his face into the pillow. Somehow through his fever sleep he had crawled across the bed to the Gryffindor's side. James sighed and placed the bowl on the bedside table.

"Tough luck, princess," he said, shoving his intruding hands underneath Sev's armpits and hauling him up, despite the Slytherin's whimpers of protest. To his defence James did his best to make Sev comfortable, propping him up against some pillows, "Here," he placed the bowl of warm broth in Severus' lap, "eat."

The boy hadn't been hungry all day but there was something about the golden liquid in the bowl that was weirdly appetising, "I don't want it," he said anyway, because lifting the spoon would

take too much of the strength he didn't have. James sighed again, like a disappointed parent, and picked up the spoon. He got some soup on it and then lifted it to Sev's mouth.

"Open up," he said cheerfully, ignoring the glare he got from Severus. When the Slytherin opened his mouth to tell him he's not letting James feed him, the Gryffindor took the opportunity to slide the spoon past his lips. Sev's glare intensified but he swallowed the hot soup, "Good boy," James said, pleased.

"Taste's weird," Severus mumbled. James pulled a face.

"Asa helped me make it, but she can't cook. Well, neither can I," he scooped up more soup and lifted it to Sev's mouth and this time the boy allowed James to feed him without any protest. He managed to finish half the bowl with James chatting about absolute bullshit, and the soup started to feel heavy in his stomach. Nausea that had to this point remained somewhere in the back of Severus' head now surged forward. He held his hand up in protest when James tried to feed him another spoonful and the boy must've noticed the sick look on Severus' face because he frowned, "What's wrong?"

"Gonna...be sick...." Severus whispered, faint, feeling like he was going to vomit and pass out simultaneously.

"Shit!" James panicked, practically throwing the bowl of soup onto the bedside table. He shoved Sev's covers to the side and hauled the boy out of the bed. The Slytherin's hot and sickly world tilted as he slumped against James, who muttered something under his breath as he dragged Severus to the bathroom.

They made it just in time. James managed to lower Sev down next to the toilet and lift up the seat, and then the Slytherin threw up noisily, gagging and clinging onto the cold porcelain. By all rights James should've been disgusted, but instead he leaned over Severus and gathered strands of his hair into his hands, pulling them from the boy's forehead as he panted heavily.

"You're okay," James said, holding the hair with one hand while the other rubbed Severus' back gently, "You're alright, just let it out."

"What the fuck is going on?" Sev heard Asadora somewhere in the back.

"He's being sick," James replied. Severus didn't hear the next part of the conversation because his body convulsed and he threw up again, the disgusting taste burning up his throat. His head felt like his head was about to explode, and his skin was on fire. He gasped shallowly for air, spitting into the toilet to try and get rid of the horrible aftertaste as James continued to rub his back.

Suddenly Asadora was there, nice, cold hand on Severus' cheek, "Here, have water," she said, pressing a glass to the boy's lips. Severus shook his head and turned away in disgust.

"You have to drink," James said soothingly from behind the boy, "it'll make you feel better."

Unwillingly, Severus took gulps of the cold water, and he had to admit it made him feel slightly better. James sent Asadora on a quest for antibiotics but she came up empty handed, though she managed to cast a spell on the Gryffindor that prevented him from catching Sev's sickness. By then Severus was so out of it that he could barely hear what they were saying. He threw up two more times.

"I-I'm okay now," he whispered, still breathing heavily.

"You sure?" James asked, anxiously leaning over the boy and stroking his back. Half-conscious,

Sev nodded his head, "Asa is there nothing you can do for him?"

"I have a spell that will eliminate any leftover in his system and make him feel less gross," the girl admitted, "but it'll put him to sleep."

"Yeah, just do it."

It was the last thing Sev remembered.

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When Severus woke up again he was back in his and James' bed, and it was dark. A sliver of light came from under the door and the laughter and voices of multiple people could be heard from downstairs – James' family was here.

James himself wasn't downstairs with them though. No, he was lying right in front of Severus, his arms wrapped around the boy, stroking the Slytherin's arm. They were side by side, facing each other. This should've surprised Sev but he was so exhausted that it didn't.

"Hey," James was wide awake and his eyes glimmered in the darkness of the room. Outside it was still snowing.

"Hi," Severus mumbled, and it took a lot of his energy to say that. James reached up and touched his forehead, checking his temperature,

"You feeling any better?"

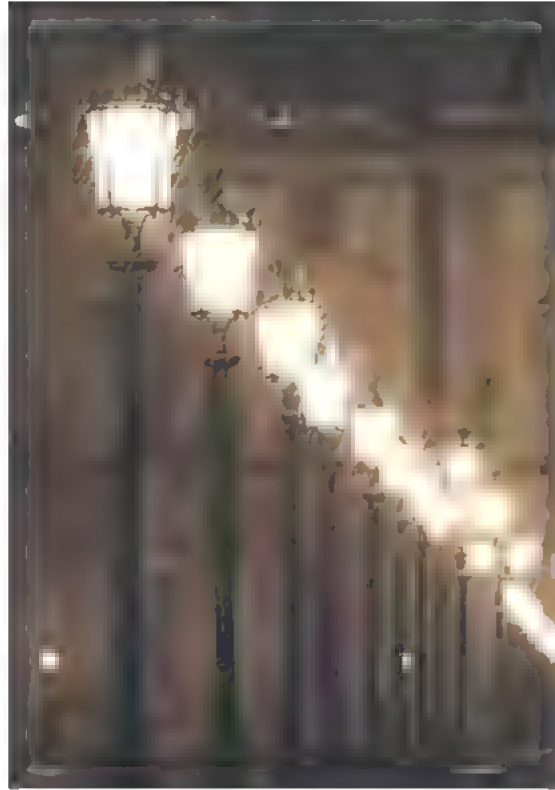
"A little," Sev admitted, subconsciously cradling closer to James' warmth. Where before he had been burning up now he was freezing cold. James must've noticed because he pulled the covers over Severus more snugly, drawing him nearer and tucking the boy into his chest. It was intimate, it was *very* intimate, but Severus' head pounded too much for him to care, "You should be down with your family," he muttered, eyes closed, revelling in James' warmth and smell.

"No, I had to make sure you were okay," the Gryffindor said, stroking Severus' hair thoughtfully.

There was a moment of peaceful silence in which Severus felt sleep creep up on him again. He wanted to get away from his illness, but not from James. Never from James. His hands, which he hadn't even realised were clinging onto the boy, tightened on the his shirt, "Thank you," Severus said sleepily.

He imagined that James kissed his forehead, or maybe he dreamt that.

## Cinema Cover-Up



Severus got better quickly over the next two days and was back to his healthy self with his fluffy hair, drowning in James' jumpers and wandering around his house as normal. It was weird to think that having him there was normal. Despite Sev obviously feeling better James' mum was still not pleased when she heard that he, James and Asadora were going for a midnight séance to the cinema to see the new science fiction movie, *Star Wars*.

"It's too cold!" she stated, looking helplessly as the trio pulled on their jackets, scarves and hats, "and the movie ends late! I don't want you kids walking about through the night!"

"Mum, we're almost eighteen," James sighed, "and we're all coming back together. It's just a movie. Besides this is Covent, nothing's going to happen to us here."

"I don't like those," James' auntie and Asadora's mother, with hair as bright green as her daughter's was blue, admitted from the kitchen, where she was nibbling on a biscuit, wearing a dress that matched her hair, "the movies. They're so *muggly*."

Asadora rolled her eyes, "The world's moving forward for wizards, mummy," she said, smirking as she threw her neon blue scarf over her shoulder with a flourish, "We might as well revel in the beauty of technology."

"We have a telly," James added, "why not go to the cinema as well?"

"Well I won't be sitting among Muggles when I'm watching my telly," James' father scoffed, coming out of the garden where he was picking up mail, dusting snow from his hair, "and besides there are wizarding channels as well."

"Well Carrie Fisher's in *Star Wars*, and she's a witch," Asadora shrugged. James' mum sighed.

"Alright I suppose I'm out of arguments. Just make sure you're safe," she said.



"I'm going back to the living room," James' dad gave a little wave and disappeared into said room, where the rest of the family was rowdily playing a game of exploding snap. James their reunion a few days ago, and all the warm hugs and *oh you've grown so much* he got from them. It was a nice memory for him to treasure because he loved his family and loved seeing all of them, but the image he had stuck in his head was actually of all of them fawning over Severus as if he was a wonder of the world, something that surprised both of the boys. All of James' aunties adored Sev and thought his shyness was cute, while the uncles tried to persuade the boy to have his first beer despite James' mum's protests. Even the kids seemed to like Severus, not scared by his dark eyes and pale complexion, clinging onto his legs after dinner and forcing the disgruntled boy to play legos with them.

It was like Severus was part of the family.

"Bye mum," James grinned at her and then ushered Asa and Sev out into the cold front yard. The door closed behind them and the trio was enveloped in the darkness of the Friday night. James couldn't keep the smile off his face as Asadora skipped ahead of them, kicking up snow and giggling as she opened the gate. Severus shuffled along, quiet. He was always quiet nowadays. James fought the urge to take his hand as he followed him out of the gate, closing it after them.

"Alright what's going on?" the Slytherin asked, stopping suddenly when they were out of the view of the house, crossing his arms over his chest, looking at the two cousins suspiciously. Asadora also stopped, underneath a street lamp, and turned on her heel, smirking at Sev, a golden light cast over her. She exchanged a look with James.

"Alright, so we're not going to see the movies, as much as I love Carrie Fisher," she admitted, a little sheepishly, sliding her arm through Severus'.

"I realised," the Slytherin said dryly, but didn't shrug her arm off, proving that he was warming up to the girl, "Nobody wears a skirt *that* short to the movies in the middle of December."

"Well, instead of going to the cinema," James stated.

"We're going clubiing," Asadora finished in a sing-song.

"Oh no," Severus didn't budge as Asa started walking and it took James sliding his arm through the boys' to forcefully start pulling her along the pavement.

"Oh yes," James grinned as they rounded the corner, their shoes crunching on the fresh snow.

"How do you even plan to get in without ID?" Snape demanded, clearly trying to discourage the crazy plan.

"We know the club guy," James winked at him in the dark and Severus glared at him in response.

"This is such a bad idea," Sev whispered under his breath.

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"This was a great idea," Sev slurred, grinning lopsidedly at James under the blue lights of the bar.

He had never drank, and he had never felt quite so relaxed as he did right now, sitting side by side with James at the counter. Thudding music came from all around them and the flashing lights were only helping to muddle Sev's already confused brain. His body felt heavy and warm and fuzzy and pleasant. The club was packed with people jamming out to the latest hits and the drinks just kept coming. This magical club in Covent Garden was underneath a Muggle bank and it had taken

Sev's breath away before the firewhiskeys that James kept buying him went to his head.

Severus was just so damn *happy*. The boy rested his arms on the bar and leaned his cheek on them, looking at James, unable to keep the smile off his mouth as he searched the boy's handsome face.

"You drunk?" James shouted over the booming music, leaning in close. Asadora had disappeared ages ago into the dancing crowd, but Severus wasn't sure he was confident enough to join her, so instead he stayed at the bar with James.

"Yeah," Severus slurred, "a little."

"You *look* drunk," James teased.

"Shuuup," Severus whined, "Another one!"

"No," James protested, laughing, "That's enough for you, pretty boy."

"Don't call me that," Severus mumbled, sitting up and feeling like a noodle as he slumped back against the bar again, his world spinning.

"But you're pretty," James said, mouth twitching into a grin. Before Severus could reply a drunk witch sauntered over, her blonde hair curled perfectly, bright red lips looking tantalizing. She leaned on the bar between James and Severus seductively and leaned into the Gryffindor.

"Hey there, sexy," she purred, "why don't you buy me a drink?"

Severus good mood disappeared instantly, as if he had been hit by a bag of bricks. This was the eighth girl in the past hour (or at least Sev thought it was an hour, though his concept of time was a little warped) that came to flirt with James, and Severus was tired of it. Of course James turned all of them down out of respect for Lily but it still hurt to look at it so Sev didn't wait to see the Gryffindor's response to this particular girl as he slid off his stool and stumbled into the crowd writhing and singing to the music.

Sev couldn't hear the music because his head was pounding too much. He clumsily pushed through the sweaty bodies, trying to find Asadora's iconic blue hair and outfit, but it was too dark here, and the lights flashing were too bright and distorted everything the Slytherin saw. Severus found that, in seconds, he was lost among the dancing people. He didn't panic for once, because the alcohol coursing through him made him happy and comfortable.

"Hiya!" a witch popped up in front of Severus out of nowhere, her ginger hair making the Slytherin think it was Lily for a second. Sev didn't have time to reply before the girl grabbed his hand and pulled him close, giggling drunkenly. Severus smiled, really confused but really happy and let the girl sway to the rhythm with him, both of them laughing, clearly very drunk. People bumped into Sev from all sides, but for some reason he didn't care.

After a minute of spinning, musical madness the girl was pulled from Sev's arms by another girl with chocolate skin, who proceeded to openly make out with the ginger in the middle of the dance floor. Severus turned away, wanting to give them privacy even though there were hundreds of people around them.

Suddenly the Slytherin wanted to get out of the crowd and find Asadora or James. He felt warm, clumsy, awkward, he kept tripping over his own two feet, people brushing against him. And then suddenly Severus was being pushed up against one of the pillars holding up the ceiling. The stone felt good and stable against the Slytherin's back, but the man pressing up against his front didn't.

“What?” Severus slurred, confused, his vision fuzzy. On instinct he gripped the man’s arms, which had caged him in. The body against his was hard and insistent and the hands slid to painfully hold his hips. Severus tried to wriggle free, a little scared, and gasped in shock when he felt a rough mouth against his neck, unwelcome and intrusive “Get a-away!” he whimpered, trying futilely to turn away, but his voice was lost in the loud music. White-blonde hair flashed in his view and for a second Sev thought that it was Lucius, Lucius who found him and was trying to fuck him again. His breathing grew erratic, panic blooming in his chest like a poisonous flower and he tried to push at the man’s chest, though half of his body felt paralyzed, passive, useless, “S-Stop-“

“C’mon,” the man growled, biting at Sev’s skin. The boy tried to reach for his wand but he couldn’t free himself from the wizard’s grip.

Just as suddenly as he had appeared, the man was hauled away. Severus blinked through the blurriness of the tears in his eyes and the alcohol that made his thoughts sluggish. James who had popped up like a knight in shining armour, casually grabbed the man by the shirt, as if this was some kind of movie, and punched him right in the nose. It all unfolded very slowly in front of Sev’s eyes. Fuck it that they were wizards and could use magic – the fury in James’ eyes made it clear that he wanted to do it this way – physically. The man that had tried it with Severus landed on his back in the crowd, groaning, blood spurting from his nose.

James grabbed Severus’ wrist and pulled him and Sev was so out of it that he only became aware of what was happening when James shoved open the back door and pulled him out into the freezing winter night. Sev hadn’t realised he was holding his breath until then and started gasping for air, his head spinning, his body sluggish. James tried to get them away from the club but Severus couldn’t do it, slumping against the closest wall as he tried to get his world to stop spinning.

“Oi, stay with me!” James said, but he sounded as if he was underwater. He crowded in against Sev, but the way he felt against Severus was different than the other man or Lucius had felt. James’ smell and warmth was comforting and Severus reached out, clutching onto the Gryffindor’s jumper, “Hey, hey, Sev,” James’ voice was all soft now but Sev couldn’t focus on him, “Hey, don’t cry.”

“I’m not,” Severus whispered and sniffled, blinking back his confusing tears. He had gone from blissfully happy to afraid and disgusted in seconds. He tugged on James’ shirt, bringing the boy closer.

“Were you scared?” James asked gently. Sev just sniffled in reply. He hated being drunk now because he had no control over his body, “It’s alright, I’ll take care of you, Sev.”

“I-I can take care of myself,” Sev whispered, his words muddling together a little.

“I know,” James said, smiling. Severus looked up at him with some difficulty, leaning his head back against the club wall.

“James,” he mumbled, because that was all he could think, just *James, James, James*.

“Mhmm?” James asked, shifting closer and gently resting his hands on Sev’s waist. The boy leaned into the touch, he *wanted* James to keep touching him. It was the first time he had ever wanted another man to touch him, another *person* to touch him.

“J-James,” Sev whispered again, shakily. He wanted things that he couldn’t find words for, that he couldn’t get past his lips.

“Shhh, it’s alright,” James pressed their foreheads together, their noses brushing together. Sev’s head was spinning, his heart pounding. They were so goddamn close, his hands tightened on James’ jumper, he wanted him, he wanted him so badly...

The door down the wall burst open and James moved away from Snape, slowly, as if reluctant, but not as if he was embarrassed to be caught being close to the other boy. Severus exhaled as the coldness hit where James had been pressed seconds ago and his drunk mind tried to wrap around what just happened.

“What the fuck did you two do?!” Asadora demanded, stumbling a little through the snow, and for a second Sev thought she had seen them and felt disgusted, “James did you *punch* someone?!”

“Maybe,” James grinned. Sev was still holding onto his jumper and he couldn’t seem to let go.

Asadora grinned, “Nice, he probably deserved it,” she lifted her hand and James high fived her, “But we have to go now before we get in trouble. Our ‘movie’s’ over so sober up boys and try to figure out how you’re going to describe Star Wars to the family tomorrow morning!”

It felt like the walk home took seconds in Severus’ drunk, confused brain.

## Potions



Severus woke up with a splitting headache so bad that he groaned out loud the moment he opened his eyes, having to shut them again. He had no idea what time it was but the light in the room was cold, watery and grey. The boy rolled onto his back and threw an arm over his eyes to block the intrusive light.

“Hangover?” James supplied from somewhere next to him, sounding pleased despite the hoarseness in his voice.

“Your voice is like needles in my brain,” Severus rasped. His throat felt ridiculously dry, “What even happened last night?” he mumbled, letting his arm slide from his eyes so he could squint at James, who was lying next to him, propped up on his arm, not looking even a little bit hangover.

“You don’t remember?” the slightly dishevelled Gryffindor asked, and Severus had to force himself not to stare at the boy’s exposed, tanned chest.

“I remember drinking with you,” Severus admitted, feeling a blush appear on his face, “and then dancing with some girl and some guy trying to...um...,” he looked away, “and then you hitting him. The walk home is blurry.”

James bit the inside of his cheek as if trying to stop himself from saying something, “Yeah, well, you were being sick,” he said and Severus winced. That explained the gross taste in his mouth, “We had to tell my mum that you had some bad popcorn and that it made you feel ill because she woke up with all the racket you were making.”

“Shit, sorry.”

“It’s alright,” James smiled a little, his eyes searching Severus’ face, “she thinks you’re a good boy so she didn’t even suspect drinking. Asa drenched us in her perfume so none of us smelled like alcohol,” when Sev didn’t reply and only guiltily started picking at a loose thread on his pillow. James’ expression softened, “You look like shit,” he said, almost fondly.

Severus rolled his eyes, “What else is new?” he grumbled, sitting up. That was a bad idea his whole world spun and it felt as if someone was using his brain as a stress ball. The boy groaned again and squeezed his eyes shut at the wave of nausea that hit him.

“Here, drink this,” James pressed a vial into his hand.

“What is it?” Sev asked, cracking his eyes open and looking at the swirling purple potion in his palm. He was good with potions but he didn’t recognise this one.

“It’s the hangover cure,” James explained, “a prototype. Asadora uses it all the time.”

"I don't know if I trust you enough to drink this," Severus admitted with his eyes narrowing. James shook his head and smiled.

"Well, enjoy your headache. Ready for breakfast?"

Sev sighed, took the cap off the vial and in one, swift movement he emptied the liquid into his mouth, making a face at the bitter aftertaste, "Not the best in the world."

"Never said it'd be," James slipped out of bed and walked over to his closet to pick out some clothes.

Minutes later the two boys walked downstairs accompanied by the delicious smell of breakfast. Severus felt considerably better as he sat at the table among the Potter family, his hangover reduced to a slight headache. Mrs Potter threw some vague questions about how the movie went but among Sev, James and Asa they managed to make up answers compelling enough that the woman dropped the subject.

Severus felt kind of like he had always been here, like he belonged. He sat between James' cousin, a five year old Wizard called Giffard that had an adorable Scottish accent, and Asadora's younger sister, Ernestina, who came to the Potter house a few days after her sister. The little one's hair was almost white blonde and right now she eagerly watched Severus butter her toast for her since she couldn't seem, or want, to do it by herself.

"Here you go," Sev said, popping the bread back on Ernie's plate when he was done with it.

"Thankyou Sevvie!" the little girl grinned, reaching for her toast.

"Sevvie," James snorted into his cup of tea across from the Slytherin. Severus glared at his friend and a chuckle went through the adults. James' mother and his aunt Fiona came in with platefuls more of bacon and eggs and the whole room was full of cheerful and sleepy voices.

"So Severus," Giffard's father, Alistair, boomed in his Scottish from next to James, where he held his one year old baby daughter, Tabitha, on his lap, "Tell us lad, have you got yourself a bird back at the big castle?"

Sev felt blood rush to his cheeks, and the family clearly noticed because they laughed heartily, "No, I don't," he said, stabbing his egg with his fork savagely.

"Oh that can't be!" Alistair protested wholeheartedly.

"Leave the boy alone," Melvin, Asadora's father, shook his head next to Alistair.

"I'll be your girlfriend!" Ernestine told Sev eagerly, butter around her mouth, earning another laugh from a family and a little smile from the Slytherin.

"What about you Jaime? How's that fiery lass of yours? Lily was it?" Alistair moved onto his nephew.

The smile slipped off James' face for a second, but quickly returned and Sev was pretty sure he was the only person that noticed, "Yeah. She's good. Still fiery."

"My lad," Alistair laughed so loudly the glasses on the table shook as he slapped James' on the back with one hand and held onto Tabitha with the other. Severus felt a little sick at the mention of Lily, wondering if he should maybe send her a letter. She sent him one a few days ago, saying how great of a time she was having at home and that she missed having Severus around, but the boy



didn't even know how to start to reply to her. *I'm in love with your almost boyfriend* didn't seem like a great start.

After breakfast the family decided to drag out a Christmas tree and whatever hard work of decorating was taken away by the use of magic was brought back by children running around the living room with Christmas decorations. James' mum sent Severus and Asadora to the shop while she made her son clean up his room and then it was lunch and the day just zoomed by so fast until suddenly-

"We're going to a bar," James' dad said apologetically, wrapping a scarf around his neck as behind him all the adults struggled into their jackets and shoes. Asadora, Severus and James, all in a line, gaped at them in shock.

"What?" James demanded.

"It's like seven in the evening!" Asadora protested.

"We're only going for a few hours, we should be back in time to put the kids to bed," Melvin said quickly. Alistair snorted,

"Speak for yerself chap, I'm staying out all night," he laughed heartily and wrapped an arm around the waist of his petite wife.

"Would you darlings look after the children?" James' mum asked sweetly, "We just need a moment of peace before the Christmas preparations start."

"Can't we go with you?" Asadora complained.

"You're underage," her mother said quickly, "Besides, we need babysitters."

"Great," James exhaled in annoyance.

Already the children had gathered behind the three teenagers – Ernestina seemed to be struggling with one year old Tabitha squirming in her chubby arms, while Giffard look at his parents with eyes as if he wanted to cry. Uncle Fiona's ten year old twins, Fay and Caspar, were poking each other, which would soon result in an argument.

"Are you going papa?" Giffard asked sadly, looking up at Alistair.

"Cheer up, wee lad," the big man ruffled his son's hair, "We'll be back soon."

"I-Is..., " Giff's chin trembled, "I-Is Sevvie going with you?"

"No pet, he's not."

Immediately Giffard brightened up and waddled over to Severus, throwing his chubby arms around the Slytherin's leg, "Yay!" he exclaimed cheerfully. Alistair snorted and shook his head. The parents quickly said goodbye to their children, eager to have some time to themselves. At the last minute Giffard and Tabitha's mum plucked the young girl from Ernestina's arms.

"I'll take her sweets," she said, a vague look of worry on her face as she hurried after the other wizards with her baby in her arms. The door closed behind the adults and Severus, James and Asadora exchanged a look. Slowly they turned around to face the clump of children, who all looked at them eagerly.

“So what do you munchkins wanna do?” Asa asked, shoving her hands into the pockets of her dungarees.

“Can we play hide and seek?” Ernestina asked keenly. James sighed,

“Yeah. Sure. Why not?”

The kids all cheered and after a moment of heated fighting it was established that Severus would be seeking (mostly since he put up the least fight). Grumpily the boy went into the kitchen and started counting loudly while the sound of loud running and giggling filled the house. The higher Sev counted the quieter it got – he heard doors opening, shelves slamming, children whispering, until finally it all went silent.

Severus trekked around the house, unenthusiastically opening cupboards and peering under tables. Giffard was easy to find, curled up in the wardrobe of the guest room, having a giggling fit. After them came Fay, who had stood behind a curtain, not realising it was partly see through. Caspar got bored of the game and abandoned his hiding spot in favour of walking up to Severus and betraying Ernie’s hiding spot, to which the Witch flew out, furious. Naturally Asadora and James were harder to find and Sev needed the whole cohort of children to help him with it – James had used his invisibility cloak and was automatically eliminated and put up for seeking next, and after a few minutes of passionate searching Asadora was located trembling in the garden, her blue hair dusted with snow, after which it was established that the garden was off-limits.

The game continued with the seekers constantly swapping and Severus was quickly running out of ideas where to hide. He didn’t want to intrude and go into other people’s rooms so he stuck to the bathroom, living room and his and James’ bedroom, but even then he ran out of options fast. It was Asadora’s turn to seek and Sev could hear her counting from downstairs. His anxiety spiked as he found himself alone in a corridor, with no place to hide while the children were long gone.

“Oi!” James hissed from somewhere above Sev. When the boy looked up he saw that the Gryffindor was peeking out from the little spiralling staircase leading to the attic section of the house, where there were two bedrooms and where kids weren’t allowed, “Come up!”

“I thought we weren’t supposed to go up there!” Sev hissed back, but he heard Asadora finish counting so he didn’t protest anymore, instead scrambling up the stairs as fast as he could without making a noise. He briefly found himself in a short, dark hallway and felt James’ warm hand on his wrist, pulling him.

The next thing Severus knew was that James had hauled him into a pitch black storage cupboard, and shoved the door shut.

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“*Lumos*,” James whispered and his wand lit up with a little pale light. He grinned at Severus. The cupboard was *tiny*, to the point where the two boys were squished together, their torsos touching, walls pressed against their backs, “I hope you’re not claustrophobic.”

“I’m not but this is uncomfortable,” Severus whispered. In the faint light from James’ wand he looked slightly ghostly, “she’s not even going to look for us here.”

“She hid up here last time so she will,” James smirked.

“No she won’t-“ Severus started again, stubbornly, but just then the Gryffindor heard steps thudding upstairs so he slapped a hand over the Slytherin’s mouth without thinking. The smaller

boy's hands immediately flew up to grip the hand on his face and he glared at James, who lifted his wand to his lips in a *shhh* gesture.

"Nox," he murmured and the light went out. They could clearly hear Asadora out in the corridor, opening doors and whistling under her breath. James grinned in the dark, though he couldn't see anything. Sev's fingers were still gripping his hand and they were cold, unlike the breath that brushed against his palm. They were so close that Severus' chest brushed against James' lightly with each of his inhales, and their noses almost touched. Finally they heard Asadora run downstairs again and James' removed his hand (a little reluctantly) allowing Sev to gasp for air, "See? She didn't find us," the Gryffindor said proudly.

"Shut up," Severus grumbled, "I don't like it in here, can we get out now?"

"No, we'll blow our cover--"

"James," Sev said firmly, and he seemed annoyed. James didn't want him to be annoyed, not when he had worked so hard on making their relationship work. With a sigh he found the doorknob blindly in the dark and twisted it.

The lock clicked hollowly but nothing happened. Frowning, James turned it again, and again, but the door remained closed.

"What's happening?" Severus demanded.

"Nothing just....," James pulled up his wand but Severus pushed against him, trying to get to the door, and it went clattering from James' hand, "For fuck's sake Sev--"

"Wait let me--"

"No just--"

There was not enough space in the cupboard. James' hands found Severus' shoulders in the dark and he firmly pressed the boy against the wall. The doorknob dug into his side when he did so since the space was so cramped.

"Let me get my wand," James said, hoping to calm the tense situation. He went to slide down to his knees but as he did so his front rubbed against Sev's because of their proximity.

"Oh no you don't!" Severus squeaked and roughly pulled the Gryffindor back up by his jumper. It took James a second to realise what would have happened if he had gotten all the way down and he felt blood rush to his face at the realisation. His eyes were getting used to the darkness of the cupboard so he could make out the outline of Severus against him.

"Right," James cleared his throat, "try feel the wand with your foot."

Severus shuffled for a few seconds, his leg bumping against James', and then sighed in irritation, "I can't feel it."

"Right, let me try," James tried to remain clear headed as he moved his leg, attempting to feel out his cursed wand. He and Severus were so uncomfortably close that he had to place his hands against the wall in the spaces between the Slytherin's arms and torso in order to keep his balance. Not that anything would've happened if he lost it, he would've just fallen into another wall, "I can't find it," the Gryffindor growled in frustration after a long minute.

Only then did he realise that Severus had been silent and that his breathing had grown more

laboured.

"Shit," James swore, "Are you having a panic attack?"

"N-No," Severus replied shakily, "J-Just...your l-leg..."

"What?" James asked, puzzled, and shifted said leg. Severus *moaned*, catching the Gryffindor completely off guard and causing all of his blood to rush south so quickly that the boy felt light headed. One of the Slytherin's hands came to slap over his mouth while the other, clearly involuntarily, gripped James' forearm. Only then did the Gryffindor feel the warm, hard thing that his thigh was pressed against. He quickly came to the conclusion that he had accidentally slotted his leg between Severus'. To prove this theory James gently moved his leg again and he felt Severus tense against him.

"S-Stop," the boy said breathlessly, almost whining, his fingers digging into James' forearm.

"Sorry," the Gryffindor said quickly, softly. He licked his lips nervously when he realised that Severus was hard against him, because of *him*. It was too dark for him to see the boy's expression but his hard breathing made it clear that he was aroused. James felt his own cock twitch in interest, "Do...do you have your wand on you? So I can open that stupid door."

"I-It's in my back pocket," Severus whispered shakily, "But I can't reach it."

"Can you turn around?" James asked hurriedly.

"No, not in particular."

James suddenly remembered how Severus had tensed weeks ago when James had him up against the wall of the Prefect's bathroom, and he remembered the finger shaped bruises on his hips.

"Right, lean forward a little," the Gryffindor instructed.

"Can't do that," Severus gritted.

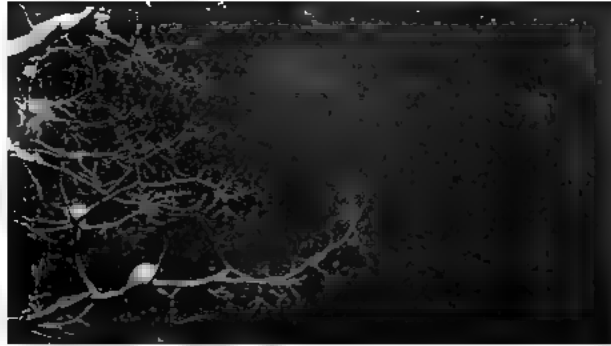
"Oh for Merlin's sake we don't have time for this," James confidentially wrapped an arm around the boy's waist and hauled him forward, causing the two to completely press together. James could only hope that Severus didn't feel the Gryffindor's hard on against his hip but honestly the Slytherin seemed to pre-occupied. He cried out at the movement as his erection rocked against James' thigh and his hands gripped the back of James' sweater. The Gryffindor wanted to fuck him so, so badly, just then and there, as the boy clung onto him so sweetly. He thought he was going to go crazy as he clumsily grabbed at the Slytherin's backside in a sluggish search for the wand. If he accidentally grabbed handfuls of the boy's ass in the process then he didn't really mean to.

"G-Got it," James said, sliding the wand from Severus' back pocket with some difficulty. The Slytherin was still holding onto him, panting against James' neck.

Without warning he suddenly snatched the wand from James' hand, "*A-Alohomora*," he gasped and the moment the door clicked open he threw himself down the stairs and sprinted into his and James' bedroom, slamming the door shut before the confused and aroused Gryffindor could so much as step out of the cupboard.

Asadora's head popped up from the staircase below, "Found you!" she called triumphantly.

## Afterglow



Severus was hugging himself, covers drawn to his chin, face almost pressed into the wall. He had stayed like this for over an hour and it was late at night at this point. He had heard Asadora and James put the kids to bed a while ago, and a few minutes back the adults had come back in from the bar, whispering and giggling. Now the house was silent and dark and everyone was asleep now and Severus laid alone in his and James' bed.

He didn't know how to feel. On one hand he felt disgustingly used, the same way he did with Lucius, even though James hadn't really done anything. Sev's eyes prickled with tears of shame as he remembered what happened in the storage closet – how must've he looked and sounded? James was probably disgusted by him. Just the thought of that made Sev squeeze his eyes shut and take in a shaky, borderline-crying breath. He shouldn't have gotten himself in that situation. If even Lucius, the man who had fucked Severus for months, didn't want to look at him while they did it then James definitely didn't. The memory of how close the two were and how James would probably bully Severus about what happened and tell his friends that the boy got hard from a simple touch made the Slytherin burn with embarrassment. He couldn't take that sort of humiliation, it was too much.

Why had he gotten hard?! It never happened with Lucius and rarely happened at all recently because the thought of someone touching Sev the way the Malfoy had done repulsed him, and yet just being close to James, feeling his breath against his skin and listening to his deep, hoarse voice made Severus' skin tingle. The boy curled in on himself further and decided firmly that in the morning he would leave the Potter house, despite the fact that Christmas was merely two days away.

The sound of the bedroom door opening made Severus tense. Why was James coming in? The Slytherin thought the Gryffindor would sleep on the couch or something because Merlin, he was probably freaked out and didn't want to be anywhere Sev...so why was he here? Severus shifted as close to the wall as he could and tried to keep his shaking to a minimum as he heard James lock the door and open the closet. The rustle of clothing indicated that the boy was changing into his night clothes. Severus hadn't bothered – in his panic he had shoved off his trousers and now laid in the bed with nothing on but his underwear and James' green jumper, which was too big on him.

The bed dipped as James got in. Severus thought he was going to be sick and he had to fight the urge to jump out of bed and run downstairs. He didn't want to cause a scene and make James hate him more than he already did. The moment the Gryffindor settled down he spoke.

"I'm sorry."

Severus turned around, completely confused and shocked and thrown off. James was laying on his side, facing away from him, for the first time since they started sharing a bed. Sev felt an invisible

hand tighten on his throat. James sounded so...sad.

“W-What?” the Slytherin asked shakily. James’ broad, naked shoulders were tense but he didn’t turn around.

“I’m sorry if I hurt you or...or made you uncomfortable uh,” the Gryffindor cleared his throat, “earlier. I didn’t mean to.” Severus was silent, trying to comprehend what the boy just said, when he spoke again, “I’m sorry if it reminded you of Malfoy in any way.”

Severus’ stomach clenched in anxiety. Of course it didn’t remind him of Lucius. Lucius was cold and selfish and rough and James was...James...Sev swallowed, feeling horrible knowing that the Gryffindor was upset. He didn’t understand why James was even apologising but that didn’t stop him from sliding forward and pressing himself against the boy’s back, resting his forehead between his warm shoulder blades, his hands curled against the Gryffindor’s back. He felt James flinch at the touch but Severus couldn’t bring himself to pull away. He *needed* it right now.

“It didn’t,” he whispered softly.

James twisted around, faster than Severus couldn’t anticipated, and when the Slytherin tried to pull away, his heartbeat escalating, the Gryffindor grabbed him by the wrists and dragged him forward, enveloping Sev in his arms before the boy could react. Sev gasped, finding himself pressed into James’ collarbone, his heart pounding as the Gryffindor held onto him tightly, preventing Sev from moving away.

“I’m sorry anyway,” the Gryffindor said with raw emotion, his lips moving against Sev’s forehead with each word. Then suddenly James kissed him there and Sev had to squeeze his eyes shut and bite his lip to stop a shaky gasp from escaping. One of the boys’ hand slid up to cup Severus’ jaw and gently angle his head upwards, so James’ lips could trail from the Slytherin’s forehead down to the tip of his nose (that he hated so much), where the hazel eyed boy placed another kiss.

“J-James,” Severus said shakily, a hand coming to rest on the other boy’s chest. But that’s all it did – it didn’t push the boy away or pull him closer, it just rested there. The Gryffindor angled Severus’ chin up higher and his eyes slid to the boy’s lips and Sev couldn’t *breathe*.

When James leaned down Severus managed to slap his hand over the Gryffindor’s mouth at the last second, preventing their lips from meeting. His heart was pounding so furiously that Severus was sure James could hear it. He was lightheaded, his cheeks were flushed, “D-Don’t,” Severus whispered, sounding heartbroken even to his own ears.

James’ gorgeous hazel eyes, so clear without his glasses, softened and he carefully reached up, pulling Severus’ delicate hand from his mouth and keeping a hold of it, “I’m not going to do anything,” he said softly, and Severus dropped his gaze because it was too much to look at the Gryffindor. James’ squeezed his hand as if in comfort, “I just want to kiss you.”

“N-No,” Sev whispered immediately, squeezing his eyes shut.

“Why?” James asked, and he sounded sad again. Severus hated that he sounded like that.

“I-I...,” Sev was having trouble speaking, “I...I never...I-I never...”

“You’ve never kissed anyone?” James offered. Sev shook his head in confirmation, his eyes still closed. Was this a dream? A cruel joke? Was James drunk?

“But what about Malfoy?” James asked, louder now, “Didn’t he...?” he trailed off suddenly and a heavy silence settled over the two boys, “He never kissed you,” the Gryffindor said eventually.



"Just do it," Severus blurted, feeling like his body couldn't take the tension between them anymore, and also wanting James to just shut up. Sev felt like he was some kind of shell, slowly getting cracked open against his will. He didn't want James to know these things about him, he was ashamed about them. Of course Lucius hadn't kissed him, Lucius hadn't *wanted* to kiss him. Nobody had ever wanted to kiss him.

The feeling of James' lips against Sev's came as a shock. They were soft, gentle, tentative, just pressing lightly against Severus'. It was nothing like what Severus expected it to be and it made him want to flinch away. Rough, detached, emotionless sex he was used to but this...this was him plunging into unknown territory. Also...

### ***WHY WAS JAMES POTTER KISSING HIM?!***

Severus didn't move, just let James continue to kiss him. The Gryffindor's lips brushed against his ever-so-lightly and the feeling of being so close to the boy but getting so little from him was making goosebumps appear on Sev's skin. James' arms were loosely wrapped around his waist, his hair tickled Severus' forehead and his mouth tasted like toothpaste. Severus was sure if he held his breath for any longer he might possibly die.

And then suddenly James' arms tightened around him and he pressed Sev impossibly close against his warm, strong chest, his mouth moving against the Slytherin's with an unexpected roughness. Sev gasped and James' hand found his jaw, so he angled the boy's head up in order to plunge his hot, insistent tongue into his mouth. Severus let out a strangled sound, his hand coming to press at James' naked chest as he felt a sudden fire shoot through him. He had seen James kiss Lily like that in the halls of Hogwarts but he never thought it would feel like *this*.

Severus broke away, gasping for air, "C-Can't breathe," he muttered, hiding his face from James, heart pounding. He heard the smirk in the boy's words when he spoke next.

"It's just kissing it's not that hard," it sounded like a taunt. Severus couldn't do this. He pushed back against James' arms in hopes the boy would get the hint and let go, but he didn't budge, "Breathe through your nose," he said, softer now and more apologetic, "and just copy what I'm doing."

Before Severus could agree or disagree James ducked his head and captured his lips again. Severus was weak. All he could do was tilt his head back and let out a little breathy gasp as James licked back inside his mouth. Through the haze that descended upon his brain Sev clumsily copied the boy's movements, brushing his lips against James', his tongue coming out to tentatively slide alongside the other boys'.

Severus liked kissing James. It made him feel warm in all the right places and although his stomach was all in knots and he felt dizzy it was a good feeling. His skin prickled and he had the urge to just snuggle into the Gryffindor and never move and just kiss him forever. The kiss went from being rough and demanding to slow and passionate and Severus' toes curled under the blanket.

James pulled away just enough so he could look at the Slytherin and his hand came to cradle the boy's face. He stroked his cheekbone, "I can't believe he never kissed you," he murmured, catching Severus off-guard. He averted his eyes, not knowing how to react. Turns out James Potter was full of fucking surprises. Sev wanted to ask what his goal here was, what he wanted from him. A shag? Head? But what if he didn't want anything and Severus would embarrass himself by even asking, "Why are you so quiet?" James asked, his thumb stilling where it had been stroking Sev's face.

"What do you want me to say?" Severus asked, sounding grumpier than he intended. James pulled his arms away from Sev and just laid on his side, watching the Slytherin. Severus almost whimpered at the emptiness and cold he felt without the Gryffindor holding him but he didn't say anything, only pulled up the covers all the way to his chin. He messed up.

"Why did you have sex with him?" James asked, voice without any emotion. It was a neutral question but it made Severus want to be sick. He closed his eyes.

"I thought I needed it," Sev admitted in a whisper after a few seconds.

"Thought?" James questioned.

Severus didn't reply. He couldn't admit to James that he was too weak to tell Lucius that he didn't want it anymore. He wanted to cry and turn away from James and disappear. Why did the Gryffindor have to mess with his mind so much?

"It's none of your business, Potter," Sev gritted out through his teeth, trying not to show the emotions racing through him, and tried to turn his back to James.

"Hey, none of that," the Gryffindor said, brows furrowed, and grabbed Severus' arm, forcing him to stay facing him, "I didn't mean to upset you."

"I'm not upset," Sev tried to shrug James' hand off but he was powerless against the bigger boy who dragged him closer and kept his hand on Severus' arm.

"Did you...do you have feelings for him?" James asked, "and just answer me," he said quickly before Severus could shut him down. The Slytherin glanced up at him slowly, "I'm not trying to ridicule you or make you feel bad or anything like that," he said gently, his hair fluffy against the pillow, "I just...I want to know what the deal between you two is."

"Why did you kiss me?" Severus blurted, because he needed to fight James' questions. A part of him really, really wanted to tell him the truth. James smiled slightly.

"I asked first," he muttered, "I'll tell you but you have to tell me first."

Severus exhaled but he didn't have an answer for that, "I wanted someone to touch me, some affection. I thought it would make me feel alive," he admitted quietly, ashamed at it. James' hand tightened on Severus' arm ever so slightly. Sev dropped his eyes, "It didn't. It made me feel like shit."

"Why didn't you just tell him to stop?"

Severus snorted humourlessly and tried not to let his mind wander to all the times Lucius used him as a fuck toy, "It's not as easy as that."

"Sev-" James started gently.

"He had all these fucking rules," Severus interrupted them, somehow unable to stop talking, "He made me feel so...so....," the boy shook his head and pressed the side of his head into the pillow, "It doesn't matter."

"Yes it does," James said firmly, "What were the rules?"

Severus shrugged, ignoring how warm his skin felt where James was holding his arm, "No kissing. I was always...um...I couldn't be on my back. He didn't want us to face each other," he felt

embarrassed saying this but he knew James would keep pressing him for answers until he broke, “we were never naked, usually I just had my trousers shoved to my knees,” Sev’s jaw clenched, “we weren’t to fuck on a bed or a couch or anything ‘proper,’ I was supposed to be quiet and if I made a noise he got mad at me. It was meant to be a no feelings kind of things and when I told him no...,” the boy trailed off.

James’ hand moved from Sev’s arm to rest on the side of his neck, tucked between his jaw and shoulder, “I’ll knock him out the next time I see him,” he said, deadly serious. Severus almost smiled.

“I can knock him out myself, Potter,” he said, borderline teasing. James smiled now too and Severus looked at him, relieved when he saw no trace of disgust or disapproval in the boy’s eyes, “Now, are you going to answer my question?”

“What question?” James asked innocently. Sev frowned.

“Why did you kiss me?”

James grinned and before Severus could react the Gryffindor flipped him over, so the boy suddenly found himself on his back, his body covered by James’, who climbed on top and with a smirk still in place crashed his mouth to Severus’. The boy’s heart jumped in his chest and he almost made a noise of surprise. His hands came up automatically as if to push James’ away, but the Gryffindor was faster - he grabbed the boys’ wrists and pinned them down to the bed on either side of his head, kissing him furiously. As much as Severus tried to hang on he found himself melting against the pillows, slack in James’ grip, shivering, mouth parting underneath James’ insistent tongue, brows furrowing.

When the Gryffindor pulled back he was smirking, ignoring Sev’s glare directed up at him, “We’re on a bed.”

“W-What?” Severus asked, terrified at how shaky his voice was.

“We’re on a bed,” James’ expression softened and he gently loosened his hold on Sev’s wrists in order to slide his fingers through the boy’s. Severus looked up at him, his heart hammering. James was holding his hands, pressing them into the mattress as he hovered over him and Severus didn’t know what to do with his pounding heart, “You deserve better than closets and floors and store cupboards.”

“J-James what the fuck?” Severus asked in a breathless whisper, eyes wide. James leaned their foreheads together.

“You deserve to be kissed,” he said and as if to punctuate that he pressed their mouths together. Severus relaxed again and arched up to chase James’ mouth when the boy pulled away.

Severus was sure James didn’t really mean anything he said – he had hated Sev so much before and all these things he was ‘feeling’ right now about him couldn’t be real. Severus wouldn’t let himself believe they were real, so he didn’t get disappointed when it didn’t work out.

James’ hands suddenly let go of Sev’s and grabbed the hem of his t-shirt instead (well, technically it was James’ t-shirt) and he pulled it over the Slytherin’s head before the boy’s dizzy brain could even catch up with his actions. He made a vague, whimpery sound and tried to catch the shirt but James carelessly flung it to the side and re-wrapped his arms around Sev’s now-naked torso, pressing their bodies together. His skin was warm against Severus.

"Merlin, you're freezing," James said in a whisper, a little breathless, a little amused. He pulled back a little and allowed his eyes to travel over Severus' pale, thin body. His hands slid gently over the dip of the Slytherin's waist and rested on his hips. The boy squirmed, grabbing at James' wrists. Sev felt horribly exposed, especially when James saw the obvious bulge in his boxers. Nobody had ever *looked* at Sev properly and now the boy just wanted to hide from his eyes because they were so intense and seemed to pierce right through all of Severus' defences.

"Stop stari-," Sev started but James ducked his head just then and pressed his warm mouth to Severus' neck. The Slytherin shivered and let out a shaky breath as James kissed his skin, nipping at it gently.

It was nothing like how Lucius did it – if he *did* even bother to touch Severus anywhere else but his ass it would always be his neck or shoulders, and mostly he would bite painfully until Sev was bruised and bloody. James' kisses were almost too gentle, just enough to tease Sev and make him ache for more.

"F-Fuck you," the boy growled out, because he was starting to get frustrated. He was half-hard and there was heat coursing through him. He wanted simultaneously to push James away and pull him closer.

"Someone's getting a bit desperate," James teased, nibbling at Sev's earlobe and making him tense up as a tingle of pleasure went through the top half of his body. The Gryffindor's breath ghosted over Sev's neck and he just made it worse by letting go of the boy's hip in order to brush his fingers playfully over Severus' crotch. It made his cock jump but James already pulled his hand away.

"Potter," Severus whined. James pulled up to brush their noses together playfully, his eyes full of mischief. Sev gritted his teeth as James looked down at him, pleased,

"I told you," the boy whispered, just close enough so his lips brushed against Sev's but not close enough to properly kiss him, "It's not Potter. It's James."

"Fucking asshole," Severus growled, trying to catch James' lips with his, though the boy swerved to the side and playfully nipped at Sev's ear again. The boy's legs seemed to spread by themselves, allowing James to settle between them more snugly. It caused more blood to rush down south and Sev felt himself throbbing with sudden need.

He had never been hard like that from anyone before.

"Say my name," James growled, his voice low all of a sudden. It should've sounded stupid and cliché but it didn't, not when James said it with his deep voice and dark eyes.

"Don't tell me what to do, Potter," Sev gritted, mostly because he wanted to regain some kind of control over the situation.

James shocked him when his hand snaked down between his legs, and gave his erection two strokes through his boxers. Severus' back arched and he cried out obnoxiously loud before slapping a hand over his mouth, panting against his palm. Malfoy had never touched him there, *nobody* had touched him there but himself. James' hand disappeared way too fast and Sev whined at the loss, glaring up at the Gryffindor.

"You're so cute when you're annoyed," James teased, clearly enjoying himself. Severus opened his mouth, ready to snap at him and tell him to fuck off but instead what came out of his mouth was-

“J-James *please*.”

James eyes widened and for a second he froze, before reaching over Severus and scrambling for his wand, “*Silencio*,” he whispered under his breath, waving his wand in a complicated way before throwing it on the bedside table. He looked at Severus and noticed that the boy was tense, “What is it?” he asked, worry marring his features.

Severus opened his mouth, and swallowed, and carefully said, “I...I thought...Lucius used to use the silencing spell on me sometimes. I just thought...,” he shrugged and looked away, feeling pathetic.

“I cast the silencing spell on the room,” James said quietly, and there was a tinge of anger in his voice at what Sev just told him. He reached down and turned the Slytherin’s face so he could look at him, “Not on you. I wouldn’t-“

Severus was too scared to hear what he was going to say so he suddenly threw his arms around the Gryffindor’s neck and dragged him down to crash their lips together. He kissed James fiercely, passionately, trying to get the heat that was boiling up inside of him out somehow. James tried to pull away for a second but then he gave in and pressed down against Sev, pushing him down into the mattress, kissing him back just as feverishly. Sev was dizzy in seconds, still not able to get around the whole breathing through your nose thing, and barely felt as James hooked his fingers in his boxers and pulled them down his legs.

He tried to pull away but Severus’ arms tightened around his neck, “Don’t,” he whispered against James’ mouth, his heart pounding in anxiety now.

“What?” James frowned.

“D-Don’t...just stay here...”

“I want to look at you,” James whispered, brushing Sev’s wavy hair from his forehead. Sev shook his head desperately, his nose brushing against James’. He couldn’t do this – he remembered everything anyone had ever said about him – ugly, skinny, disgusting. He was just flooded with insecurity and suddenly he felt so shit he just wanted to curl up in the covers and disappear. He felt his cock starting to soften against his stomach.

James saw the panic in his eyes, “Hey, alright, alright,” he pecked Severus on the lips quickly, “I won’t look, I promise,” he murmured and started kissing Sev again, trying to get him to relax. His big, tanned hand travelled down to Severus’ crotch and before the boy could protest, his fingers wrapped around his member properly.

Sev let out a muffled moan against James’ mouth, his hips stuttering upwards. James’ fingers moved in slow, long strokes, all the way up Severus’ shaft and the boy was panting helplessly in seconds. His fingers slid into James’ messy hair, just so he could hold onto something as he hardened fully and felt pleasure start pumping through him. The strokes sped up and Sev felt light-headed, his muscles clenching.

“F-Fuck,” he whispered, and James bit at the Slytherin’s bottom lip, clearly teasing though it made Sev whine with want as he pushed himself closer to the Gryffindor. He didn’t think someone else’s hand would feel *this* good against his cock. Severus bit his lip and turned his head away, feeling himself blushing and shaking, he probably looked like a right mess but he couldn’t focus on that, not now, not when he felt like he was going to explode, “F-Fuck...J-James...”

Severus hoped that James would kiss him again, to silence the horrible moans spilling out of his

mouth, but instead the Gryffindor buried his face in his neck and started kissing him there. Sev tried to hold himself together, his fingers gripping James' hair, but James' hand sped up on Severus' member and it was way too fast and way too much and Severus slapped his hand over his mouth, desperate, high-pitched moans spilling out.

"No, no you don't," James grabbed said hand and pinned it down to the pillow on the side of Sev's head, his other one stroking the Slytherin furiously.

"Nghhh," Severus whimpered and bit his lip, his toes curling. He squeezed his eyes shut because it was getting too much. His stomach was all in knots, his body was shaking with tension. James' palm was rough and calloused and fast and Severus came without warning.

He shuddered, gasped quietly and slumped against the mattress shakily as a wave of pleasure washed right over him. Sev managed to hold onto James so the boy didn't pull back and look at the mess that the Slytherin was right now, with cum dripping from his cock onto his stomach. James kissed his shoulder and licked his neck and Sev felt it as if through a haze.

"You okay?" he asked after a few seconds, pulling back a little. Severus opened his eyes and nodded, not trusting his voice. James hovering above him right now in the darkness of the room was the most gorgeous thing Severus had ever seen.

The Gryffindor frowned, "Your lip's bleeding," he said softly, ducking his head to press a tiny kiss against Sev's lip where he had bit it too hard in an effort to stay quiet. It stung a bit but Severus didn't mind, his body still drowning in pleasure.

"Can I keep going?" James asked.

"H-Huh?" Sev asked shakily, his mind groggy from the afterglow. He realised that James hadn't come yet, "Y-Yeah," he said, preparing himself to get the other boy off. That's why he was surprised when James grabbed his legs and pulled them up to his waist. Severus wrapped them around the Gryffindor, barely aware of what he was doing. James' hands ran over Severus' backside, making the boy blush when he squeezed one of the pale globes playfully.

James reached for his wand again and muttered a spell under his breath and then next thing Sev knew was that there was a finger circling his hole. Severus tensed up, remembering the horrible feeling of having Malfoy's digits shoved inside him roughly with no preparation. He knew what was coming and he steeled himself for that feeling-

But it never came. Instead James kissed just below his chin and his finger slid easily inside him. Severus inhaled sharply when he realised that the spell James said must've been some stupid lubrication one, but it worked because there was none of that pain that usually accompanied penetration. Sev's entrance burned a little because he hadn't had sex in weeks but it wasn't unpleasant.

He turned his head so it was half-pressed into the pillow and let out a shaky breath. James' free hand rested next to his head and so Sev reached up to grip at it, panting as the Gryffindor moved the finger in and out of him slowly before gradually speeding up. His eyes were focused intently on Sev's face and the boy was trying to keep his breath measured and calm.

"You don't have to hold back," James said softly. Sev bit his lip but it hurt to do that since it was already split.

"I-I'm not," he lied shakily. James pushed a second finger inside him without warning and Severus choked on a moan before quickly clamping his mouth shut to stop any other noises. He was just



too embarrassed.

James leaned in and kissed Severus sweetly, "I'll make you scream, I promise," he said softly and then grinned.

"Fuck off," Severus rumbled. James pulled his fingers out and pushed them back in and then he repeated that motion, faster, and faster again, and Severus started breathing hard because it was impossible to retain complete control and then James pushed a third digit inside him and started *fucking* him with his fingers and Severus moaned, even though he tried not to.

The burn of having James fingering him like that was quickly accompanied by overwhelming pleasure and Severus was writhing on the bed in minutes, a thin layer of sweat over his body. It was nothing like what he had felt before, and he didn't know how to deal with all the feelings and emotions assaulting him.

"O-Oh Merlin," he gasped, "F-Fuck-ah!" he cried out when he felt James' fingers bump against something inside him that made him jerk and tense and pleasure coil in his stomach. The mischievous grin on the Gryffindor's face showed that he knew exactly what it was.

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James was going to go crazy, he was actually going to *lose* his *fucking* mind. Severus looked like a completely different person underneath him right now, even though when he was normal he made James crazy anyway. But now...now James could barely hold his shit together. Sev was so lost in pleasure that he didn't even notice that James had pulled back and was openly looking at his pale, writhing body. His head was tossed back against the bed, hair wavy and dark and silky on the pillows. His eyes were closed, mouth swollen and parted as he took shallow, trembling breaths. All the harsh lines of his face seemed softer now, but that could've been because of his orgasm. Both his arms were limp on the sides of his head, hands curled into loose fists. His cheeks were flushed, and so were the tips of his shoulders and his collarbones. The rest of him was milky white, with a thin sheen of sweat over his skin, his cock curved against his flat stomach, dripping pre-cum onto his bellybutton. His legs were still thrown around James' waist, but they weren't clinging on as tight as before, as if Severus was slowly melting.

James watched his fingers disappear inside the boy, completely mesmerized, and tried to keep himself under control. He couldn't lose it, not now, he couldn't hurt Severus the way Malfoy did. He wanted to take care of him, more than anything. It made his heart throb to think that anyone – even him – could've ever hurt the boy. He was so *tiny* and vulnerable and gorgeous and he was just completely trusting James in that moment.

The Gryffindor leaned down and kissed Sev's forehead, causing the boy to open his dark eyes. James removed his fingers and kissed the Slytherin – his kissing, compared to the way it was an hour ago, was a lot better now, and even if it was still a little clumsy it made the Gryffindor stupidly happy.

"You're so beautiful," James blurted, because the words felt like they were going to explode out of him if he didn't get them out. He realised his mistake when Severus' jaw clenched and he tensed in his arms. For a second the Slytherin looked angry.

"Can you just get on with it and fuck me?" he asked, annoyed, glaring at James. The Gryffindor's heart dropped and he felt pain bloom inside him.

"No," he said softly, cupping Severus' face, only to have the Slytherin bat his hands away, "I'm not *just* going to get on with it," James said, trying to get his lover to look at him, "and I'm not

going to *fuck* you. That sounds so violent and I would never hurt you.”

Severus sat up abruptly, shoving James back, “I don’t want to do it anymore,” he said firmly and went to stand up but James grabbed his arm, heart pounding, and pulled Severus against him, capturing him in his arms, “Let go.”

“Tell me why you’re angry,” James whispered, kissing the back of Sev’s neck, desperate to keep the boy close. He couldn’t bear to be away from him now, he wanted to hold him for the rest of the night.

“I can’t do it like this,” Severus said after a little pause, and he sounded a little broken. James wished he could see his face but in this position it was impossible, “I-I can’t have you saying all those stupid things that you don’t mean and kissing me all the time and stopping to just touch me for no reason and making me feel all...,” he shook his head.

“Do you want to stop?” James asked softly. Severus looked at him helplessly over his shoulder.

“No. Can you *just* have sex with me?”

James exhaled, “Yeah. Alright. If that’s what you want.”

Severus slid out of his arms and back onto the bed, lying on his front. James had to admit the view was quite nice, Sev’s skin shining in the moonlight falling through the window and reflecting off the snow outside, the dip of his back leading to his perky, pale ass. But James didn’t want to do it like this, he didn’t want to do it like Malfoy. But apparently that’s what Severus wanted.

James got behind him and took Severus’ hips in his hands, remembering with pain the bruises that had been there weeks ago. Despite that thought James’ cock was still hard and throbbing between his legs at the sight of Severus’ nakedness and when Sev reacted automatically to his touch, pushing himself up on his arm and knees, it just made James more excited. He plastered himself over the Slytherin’s back and, despite knowing it would annoy Severus, he kissed the back of his neck again. He wished he could look at his face right now.

“Are you sure this is okay?”

“Yes. Just get on with it,” Sev muttered. Although he sounded like he wanted it there was something about his words that made James feel like he was forcing himself on the boy. When he didn’t react Severus let out a sigh of frustration and reached back, his hand wrapping around James’ hard cock. The Gryffindor gasped with surprise, especially when Sev tugged him forward, urging James to push inside him.

James squeezed his eyes shut when his member caught on the rim of Severus’ hole and the next thing he knew he was sliding into the Slytherin. They both let out choked off moans and Severus’ hands curled into the sheets below him. James sank into his delicious, wet, tight heat and he thought he might’ve died in that moment, and gone to heaven. It felt amazing, better than any girl that James had ever had, or any boy even. It felt like years of tension had led up to this moment. James’ hands subconsciously tightened on Sev’s hips and he tried to breathe evenly but was unable to hold back a groan of pleasure as he bottomed out inside Severus.

The Slytherin was silent and shaking. James stroked his lower back, attempting to soothe the boy, “You alright?”

“J-Just give me a s-second,” Severus said unsteadily. James needed a second too, or he was sure he’d come.

"You feel amazing," he whispered.

"Shut up."

"You're so sweet," James said sarcastically with an eye-roll. Severus glanced at him over his shoulder and James saw a glimpse of his flushed cheeks and half-open, lust filled eyes and he just wanted to *look* at him.

"You can move now," Severus turned back around again. James wanted to think with his head and his heart but honestly he could only think with his dick at his moment and almost against his will he pulled out of Severus, slowly, inch by inch, and then watched his cock disappear inside the boy once more. The feeling of rubbing against him made heat coil in James' stomach every time he plunged into his entrance. Severus let out a muffled moan and when James thrust into him again, harder than he meant to, his arms gave out and he slumped forward, burying his face in the pillow.

James gripped his hips and established a pace that made him breathless and caused pleasure to build up in his body. It also made Sev let out little, involuntary moans, his ass up in the air. Without meaning to James' thrusts sped up more and more until he was pounding Severus so hard the bed was slamming against the wall. He was glad that he had bothered with the silencing charm, but what he hadn't bothered with was a condom.

"A-Ah," Severus whimpered beneath him, voice strained, "G-God...f-fuck..."

James couldn't take it. He felt the pleasure building up inside him but he *needed* Sev closer. He wrapped an arm around the boy's waist and pulled him backwards, so his chest was pressed against the boy's back.

"J-James-," Sev gasped, clawing at James' arm, still around his waist. James started kissing his neck, gripping the Slytherin tightly as he continued to fuck him. He was pleased when Severus slumped against him, his head rolling back against James' shoulder. Like this James could plunge deeper into the Slytherin and he knew that he had found his prostate when the boy started letting out moans that were borderline sobs.

"J-James...James....*James*....," he gasped, over and over, fingers digging into James' arm.

"Shhh, you're perfect, it's alright, I've got you," James whispered, blabbering, his brain so pleasure addled that he didn't even know what he was saying. Sev's moans got louder and more desperate, his back arching as he pushed back against James at every thrust. The Gryffindor felt his orgasm approaching stupidly fast and he reached to Sev's front to wrap his hand around his cock. He gave it maybe four strokes before Severus was slumping forward and crying out, coming for the second time. His hole clenched around James' cock, his passage hot and pulsing, and the Gryffindor came as well.

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It took Severus a few minutes to come back from his second orgasm. He was sure he passed out for a few minutes and was dimly aware that James had cast a cleaning spell on them and the sheets, before getting Severus in some comfortable sweatpants and a short sleeved t-shirt, both belonging to James. It smelled like him and the Slytherin felt cold now that he was out of James' arms.

He could hear the boy ruffling around the room as he curled back up in the clean bed, the covers thrown over him. He was still dizzy, light-headed and basking in the last of his afterglow. He had never come from sex before and now he felt like a limp noodle. The ghost of James' fingers were still on him but Sev wanted the real thing – and he got it, fast.

James slid back underneath the covers, his body warmth attracting Severus, who shuffled across the bed and into his arms without even realising what he was doing.

"I thought you were mad at me," the Gryffindor teased, wrapping his arms around Sev and kissing the top of his head as if they were in love or something. It was a nice thought for Severus and just for that little moment he allowed himself to believe it.

"My brain isn't working don't ask me things," he grumbled. James let out a little huff of laughter and kissed his head again before stroking his hair gently. Severus was on the verge of falling asleep, but of course James had to keep talking.

"I meant what I said," he whispered. Severus snuggled closer.

"Mhmm."

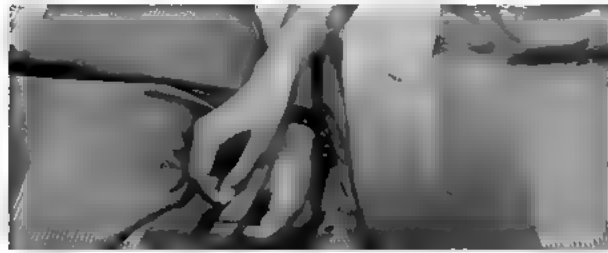
"I mean it, you're beautiful."

"No I'm not," Sev slurred, not even aware of the words leaving his mouth. He heard James sigh and felt him kiss the top of his head again, before going down to his forehead, the tip of his nose and finally his lips.

"Goodnight, beautiful."

"Goodnight asshole," Sev mumbled, and fell into the best sleep of his life.

## Under the Shower



It was the middle of the night, it was Christmas tomorrow night, and Severus was having a shower. He had woken up past midnight, wrapped up double – once in a blanket and once in James' arms - all sweaty and gross despite the cleaning charm James had cast on him and so decided to have a quick shower. Now he stood beneath the warm water and, unlike two weeks ago, he actually enjoyed it cascading down his body. He felt weird – he ached in all the places James touched him, but his stomach and heart and skin were all warm and tingly and soft and he felt *content*.

And a little happy. The feeling was so foreign to him, it was something Severus wasn't sure he ever experience fully.

The door clicked open and Severus jumped in the shower and was about to reach for a towel to hide his nakedness when James slipped into the steamy bathroom, closing the door behind him.

"What the *fuck*?" Sev hissed at the other boy, outraged.

"*Colloportus*," James mumbled, locking the door, before turning to Sev with a devilish grin.

Despite knowing that realistically James saw all of him a few hours ago Severus still felt self conscious since they were in the bright lights of the bathroom. The Gryffindor was grinning at him charmingly, hair messy, just in his boxers. Seeing him reminded Sev of how he had touched him before – it made him blush to recall just how easily he had fallen apart underneath his hands.

"Don't you dare!" Severus protested when James casually shoved off his boxers.

"Shut up," the Gryffindor said, somehow managing to simultaneously sound cheerful and sleepy as he stepped into the bathtub. In his defence the Slytherin held up the shower head and aimed the warm water at James in some attempt to keep the boy away. Of course the Gryffindor ignored the water and closed the little space between him and Severus, wrapping an arm around the Slytherin's waist and wrestling the shower head from his hand before kissing him passionately and with no restraint.

It was fiery and wet and a little sloppy but it made the familiar heat that Severus felt before explode in his stomach again. Subconsciously his hands came up to cup the Gryffindor's face. James seemed to like that because he pressed Slytherin up against the cold tile wall and replaced the shower head on its stand so he could touch Sev with both hands. The Slytherin lost himself in the Gryffindor's rough, calloused hands sliding over his sides and hips for a second, allowing him to kiss him intensely and squeeze his ass before Sev finally got a hold of himself enough so he could pull away.

"James," he protested weakly as the Gryffindor licked at his wet neck, brushing his damp, wavy hair behind his ear. "James," Sev gasped, his arms sliding around the Gryffindor's neck. He felt his blood rushing south dangerously just from being close to the bigger boy, his cock twitching into semi-hardness against his stomach, "I...I just wanted to shower..."

"Mhmm," James hummed, nosing at the side of Sev's face playfully, "Shower then."

"I can't with you here," Sev grumbled, trying to push James away half-heartedly. James didn't say anything, just leaned over and grabbed a bottle of shampoo, his wet torso sliding against Severus' pleasantly. He glanced at Sev, smirked, and ducked his head to peck him quickly on the lips before pouring some of the shampoo into his palm. He continued to kiss Sev as he soaped up his own hair, their tongues tangling together.

"You can wash my hair if you want," James teased, pulling back a little. Sev frowned.

"What?"

James slid to his knees gracefully. Severus' heart jumped in his chest and he opened his mouth to ask what the hell the other wizard was doing, but before he could James unceremoniously swallowed Severus' member, as if he had been born for it. The Slytherin choked out a weak moan.

"F-Fuck!" he gasped as his cock swelled to full hardness as it slid into James' velvety mouth. The Slytherin trembled and his knees almost gave out as he leaned forward subconsciously, his fingers sinking into James' shampooed hair. He bit his lip and rested his head back against the tiles of the bathroom, his breath coming out extra loud as it echoed around the room, mixing with the sound of the water from the shower hitting the bottom of the bath. The air was steamy from the heat of said water, and it made Sev's vision hazy, or maybe that was just the pleasure he was feeling.

James bobbed his head, swallowing Sev's cock with surprising ease. Severus was whimpering under his breath as he felt the Gryffindor's wet tongue swirl around the head of his hard member. Sev had never gotten oral before though he gave it to Lucius enough times to decide that he hates it. James didn't look like he hated it though – his eyes were closed, hair wet and soapy, mouth wrapped around his member. Severus, despite knowing that James had cast a silencing spell, felt like the whole house could hear the little desperate moans coming from his mouth.

His orgasm came out of nowhere, "*James*," the Slytherin had time to pant out but it was enough and James managed to pull away, Sev's cock popping out of his mouth with an obscene sound, just before the Slytherin spilled cum down his throat, slumping helplessly against the cold wall of the bathroom, his hot back sticking to the tiles. The water was still falling on them and James stood back up, grinning.

"You have cum on your face," Severus tried to sound sarcastic but he was still breathless from his orgasm so it came out all wrong. James' grin widened and he leaned forward, caging Sev in with his arms on either side of his head, and he leaned down in an attempt to kiss him. Sev turned his face with a disgusted noise.

"It's *your* cum," James grumbled in protest, but stuck his head underneath the spray of the water, washing his mouth and the shampoo out of his hair while he was at it.

Severus took the opportunity and stepped out of the bathtub, reaching for a towel and hurriedly wrapping it around his waist. James shut off the water and looked at him with an unreadable expression on his face, dark hair wet and dripping onto his broad, tanned shoulders.

"Why are you always trying to get away from me?" he asked quietly, catching Sev off guard. The Slytherin looked up at him in surprise from where he was reaching for a second towel to dry his hair.

"I'm not," he said. James stepped out of the shower.

“Right,” he said, voice tight. Severus’ shoulders slumped. James was upset but the Slytherin didn’t know why – he wasn’t sure why the Gryffindor even wanted affection from *him* of all people. Shyly, Severus chuckled the towel he just picked up over James’ head, now surprising the Gryffindor in turn, who looked at him with big, hazel eyes.

“Sorry,” Sev mumbled, reaching up to gently dry James’ hair with the towel. He had to stand on his tiptoes in order to do so and it made James smile gently. He leaned down and pressed his forehead against Severus, closing his eyes. Severus’ fingers slipped from the towel to touch James’ warm cheeks, “I’m not trying to get away from you,” he whispered. *Not anymore*, he added mentally.

James’ smile widened and he pecked Sev on the lips, “Good.”

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James woke up in the morning because he heard familiar voices downstairs – otherwise he wouldn’t have roused. He honestly felt like he could spend the whole day in the bed, just like this, looking down at Severus in his arms, asleep and soft and gorgeous and perfect. It was snowing outside, but the room was full of a soft light. James didn’t want to move from the bed.

Except that he could hear Sirius and Remus downstairs.

“Fuck,” James swore, freeing his arm from underneath Severus and rolling out of bed, almost ending up on the floor. The Slytherin woke up thanks to the noise and opened his eyes groggily.

“Why are you banging about?” he grumbled, snuggling into James’ pillow. It was kind of adorable, especially when Severus hugged the pillow as if it were a Gryffindor. It almost made James hop back into bed, if it wasn’t for the anxiety blooming in his heart.

“Remus and Sirius are downstairs,” he hissed, picking up his shirt from the floor and shoving it on. Severus sat up abruptly, his hair falling messily to his shoulders, eyes wide with panic. His lips were still swollen from last night, cheeks flushed from sleep, and he looked completely fucked, but in the best way and *oh Merlin...* James’ heart was pounding – he hadn’t know that his friends were coming and now he was faced with a horrifying decision.

He could pretend that there was nothing between him and Severus, throw his pillow on the floor with a blanket and act as if he and the Slytherin hadn’t shared a bed for the past two weeks. He couldn’t imagine seeing the pain on the boy’s face though, couldn’t imagine hurting him like that. On the other hand he could face the judgement that he would undoubtedly get from his friends if he confessed the feelings he had for the Slytherin. Honestly James was leaning towards that option – falling asleep with Sev in his arms was one of the best things ever, right up there with drinking butterbeer with his best friends and playing Quidditch. Sirius would be hurt, but Remus would (hopefully) accept James’ feelings...

“I,” James started, hearing his mother speaking to Remus and Sirius downstairs.

Severus scrambled for his wand and muttered a series of spells insistently under his breath. A pillow and a blanket floated from the bed and onto the floor, creating a makeshift bed on the ground. Sev climbed out of the bed hurriedly and looked at James.

“Don’t tell them anything,” he hissed.

The anxiety in his voice, as if he was having the same dilemma as James, made it clear that he didn’t want James’ friends to know about their relationship. That *hurt*, so badly, but James couldn’t



do anything about it – not now anyway. He gave Severus a look full of pain and then walked out into the corridor and pounded down the stairs.

He found Remus and Sirius sitting on the couch in the living room. The former's hair was combed and he was dressed in a nice scarlet Christmas jumper but his skin was pale and there were dark circles under his eyes. Sirius, on the other hand, was radiating health despite being dressed in black, the top of his overgrown hair pulled to the back with some pins.

"James!" Sirius jumped to his feet and threw his arms around his friends in seconds, squeezing him so tightly it was almost painful. James laughed, his worries disappearing for a second as he was flooded with warmth and comfort, embracing his almost-brother.

"I can't believe you guys are here what the hell?!"

Remus was more collected in his affection as he rose from the couch, smiling tiredly and waiting patiently for Sirius to let go of James before giving him a long but weak hug, "How are you Prongs?"

"I'm good. Yeah. Really good," James said, grinning and breathless as he looked at his two friends, "You don't look so good though, Moony."

"He's fine," Sirius said cheerfully, throwing his arms around the taller boy's shoulders' with some difficulty.

"Being with Padfoot for two weeks is exhausting," Remus said fondly, looking softly at Sirius. The dark haired boy's eyes widened suddenly and his hand shot out to grab James' wrist.

"Snivellus!" he hissed, voice low as if they were conspiring together, "He's here!" he remembered suddenly.

James rolled his eyes, "Yes, great observation."

Sirius' eyes narrowed and he looked around the living room, "He contaminated my home."

"Stop being dramatic," Remus poked him in the ribs and then turned to James, "How is he?"

"I'm fine, thank you for asking Lupin," Severus replied sarcastically from the doorway. The heads of the trio snapped up in surprise and they all looked at the boy, leaning against the door frame.

James had to admit that Sev looked hot, just standing there, wearing one of James' white jumpers, arms crossed over his chest, hair waving down to his shoulders. He looked unimpressed, all innocent, unlike someone who had just been royally fucked the night before, eyebrow arched, and James just wanted to pull him close and get him all blushing and stuttering and the way he had been just a few hours ago...

"And I was having such a great morning too," Sirius huffed under his breath. Remus shocked everyone by glaring at his friend before casually strolling over to Severus and wrapping him up in a quick, formal and a little awkward hug that left the Slytherin losing all composure, gaping at the werewolf.

"It's nice to see you, Severus," Remus said kindly, "You're looking good."

"T-Thanks," Severus stuttered, caught off guard. Thankfully he was saved from the unfamiliar situation by Asadora who came pounding down the stairs, her neon blue hair flying. She almost barged right into James' mum, who was carrying a tray of tea to the boys. With a delighted squeal

she pushed past Sev and threw her arms around Remus and Sirius simultaneously.

“My boys!” she exclaimed. James grinned, loving the reunion, and when he glanced at Severus he found nothing but an empty doorway.

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At dinner Severus felt like shit. His body still ached from the night before, more now than before, and he felt tired as he sat squished at the table downstairs, eating dinner with the Potters. It was different now that Black and Lupin were here and all of Sev’s comfort and relaxation that he had acquired with the family evaporated. He sat tense in front of his full plate, not touching the food, the loud voices of multiple conversations around the table flooding right over his head.

Asadora was squeezed next to Remus, having an excited conversation with him about something Severus couldn’t hear. The children had lost all the love and interest they had in Sev over the past week as well, now clambering all over Black’s knees as he entertained them. Severus felt out of place, especially with Black, who kept glaring at him and sending him hateful looks. Lupin was more welcoming and for that Severus was glad, but it just wasn’t enough.

Earlier James and his friends had gone out for a ‘walk’ and stayed out for *hours*. Severus declined Lupin’s and James’ invitation to join them in the snowy landscape because he knew he’d be intruding on a best friend catch up. He was aware that he would never be part of their little group and he didn’t want to make James feel uncomfortable by clinging to him, especially after what happened with them the night before. Instead Sev took care of the children and helped the women with preparation for tomorrow’s Christmas dinner, and he did some divination homework and played magical chess with Asadora, and missed James the whole time.

And now, at dinner, he just wanted to go upstairs. He felt bad for wishing that James’ friends hadn’t come because he knew that Gryffindor was happy with them around. But Severus just wanted to return to last night, when he was in James’ arms and no doubts plagued his head.

Of course the moment the dreadful dinner ended and the four found themselves upstairs, Severus regretted it and wanted to return to the living room. Lupin had taken the time to cast some spells on James’ room, mostly to make his bed bigger, and now the trio were arguing about who was sleeping where.

“I’ll take the floor-,” Sev tried to say for the eighth time.

“No,” Lupin said immediately, “we can all sleep on the bed, the floor gets cold and you’ll get a cold.”

“I slept on the floor for the past two weeks,” Severus replied. He was lying of course, in order to save James the embarrassment of explaining their sexual relationship to his friends. It hurt, because Severus felt like he was worthless again, but he didn’t want to make James ashamed so he kept quiet.

“Well we’re here now and we’re more civilised than James,” Lupin said, giving the Gryffindor a pointed look, “I’ll sleep on the edge.”

“No *I’m* sleeping on the edge!” Black protested.

“Oh for Merlin’s sake,” Severus grumbled, tired of the fighting, and climbed into the bed before any of the other three could react, pressing himself up against the wall and throwing one of the four covers over himself. James, Black and Lupin exchanged a look and in the next minute they

somehow managed to agree on spaces and were all underneath the covers in no time.

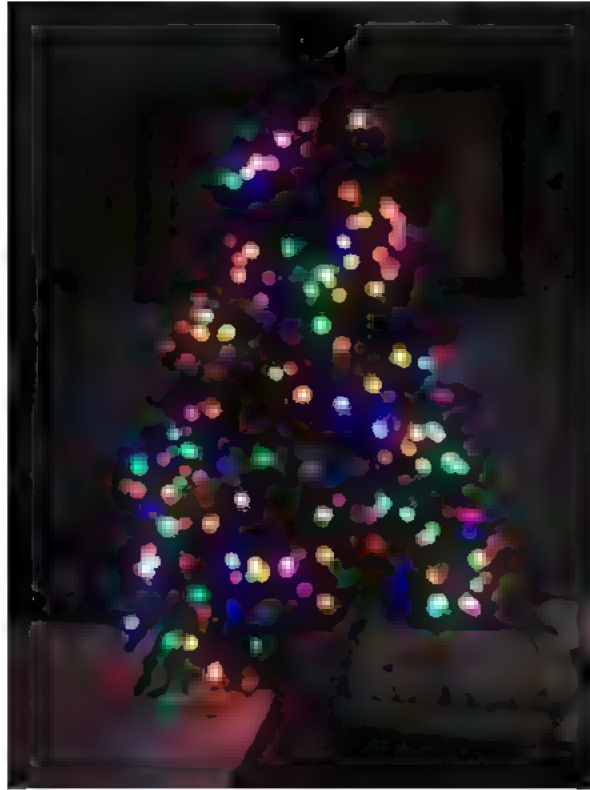
It was dark in the room and the snow falling outside the window was perfectly visible. Black ended up sleeping on the edge, then Lupin, then James, and finally Sev, all pressed against each other like sardines in a can. The Slytherin laid facing the wall, a little annoyed, a little frustrated, a little upset. He didn't know what he wanted in that moment, and having James pressed snugly against his back was just making everything worse, especially since there were two other people in the bed with them. It was making Severus' mind wander to dangerous places.

James didn't seem to care though. As soon as he and his friends stopped whispering jokes to each other and their giggling died away, his arm found its way around Sev's waist. The Slytherin exhaled but he couldn't even tell the boy to let go because Lupin and Black would've heard. He had to allow the Gryffindor to hold him then, not that he minded completely, except that it made his heart pound and his skin burn.

James was clearly unaware of this because he pressed himself closer and kissed the top of Sev's head, tucking the Slytherin underneath his chin. Sev fit in his arms so well, and he felt so safe there, and it was all just too much. He remembered how James had said that he was running away from him and that he was cold towards him, but he didn't know how else to act and what else to do. He was so scared that James would discard him the second he got bored that it was hard to trust him. Nobody but Lily and Sev's mother had ever been even remotely affectionate towards the Slytherin and having James act so kind...it was unnerving.

*I need to send a letter to Lily,* Severus resolved as he relaxed into James' arms despite his better judgement. Right now he had no choice though but allow the Gryffindor to hug him, his chest rising slowly against Sev's back as the sound of Black's snoring filled the room.

## A Year's Worth of Chocolate



James woke up all sore from sleeping in a weird position. His back ached and his arm was numb. When he looked at the part of the bed behind him he saw that the only thing stopping Sirius from tumbling off was Remus' arm around his waist, thought one of his feet was still on the ground. Remus, in turn, had slid halfway down the bed, so his face was pressed into Sirius' shoulder blades, feet hanging off the end of the bed. There was a sliver of mattress between Remus and James since the Gryffindor had pressed himself so tightly against Severus, who was captured between his body and the wall. He seemed content though – as James looked down at him with bleary eyes he noticed that the Slytherin looked a little bit like a cat, breathing gently against James' chest. The Gryffindor found himself smiling, so warm and happy, and leaned down so he could wake up Severus with a kiss.

And then he remembered where he was, and stopped himself. His two friends were sleeping behind him, and Sev was *not* his boyfriend and he didn't know how the boy would react if he tried to kiss him. James didn't really know *what* they were exactly and he couldn't ask why now, since Remus and Sirius were here now. James had to make do with just enjoying Sev's body warmth against him.

Sirius shifted, and something rustled at the foot of the bed. James flinched when the boy sat up abruptly, "PRESENTS!" he bellowed, looking like an excited kid on...well, Christmas. Which was ironic because it *was* Christmas. In seconds Sirius' loud ass voice had the other boys up and hurriedly scrambling to sit on the bed, pulling packages titled to them into their laps (Remus had to pick his off the floor since he had kicked them off).

"Merry Christmas!" James said in delight as he ripped into his packages, the familiar butterflies of excitement erupted in his stomach. He might've been seventeen but he was still a child when it came to presents. In seconds the bed was littered with wrapping paper.

James got tickets to the Quidditch semi-finals from his parents, a miniature of the new broom, the

Swiftstick from Asadora, that flew around James' room as he freed it from the packaging. One of his uncles – and James was sure it was Alistair – got him a penknife that changed into fifteen other objects including a spoon and a mini-axe. James also got some more muggle objects from his aunts and uncles like new bedsheets, a jumper, money and a wallet, as well as a book about the history of magic that James tossed to the side almost immediately.

“What the hell is this?” James asked when he opened the beautifully packaged box from Remus. Inside he found that it was bottomless and it was *full* of chocolate. The werewolf shrugged.

“Supply of chocolate,” he said casually, putting on a ridiculous purple, feathered hat that Sirius got for him, “For a year.”

James grinned, “You’re crazy. Both of you,” he added, gesturing to the bottle of Firewhiskey laying buried underneath his new jumper that Sirius had gifted to him. Remus and Sirius started laughing and so did James, watching his two friends friendly banter and push at each other over their presents, Remus still wearing his stupid hat.

“Boys!” James’ mum called from downstairs, “Breakfast!”

“Woohoo!” Sirius cheered and clambered off the bed, throwing himself to the door, Remus on his heels, telling him to slow down. James grinned and turned to Severus, genuinely happy for that moment – it was Christmas, he had his best friends with him, and the boy he might’ve-kind-of-sort-of-loved-a-little-bit was right next to him.

James’ heart jerked in his chest when he saw Sev’s face.

The boy was sitting with the covers still around his waist, holding three presents in his lap – a set of quills with beautiful sleek black feathers that were undoubtedly from Lily, a book on potions that James had proposed when his mother had asked what Severus would like, and a forest green scarf that James himself had gotten for the boy. For some reason Severus didn’t wear the Hogwarts scarf, even in the coldest Scottish winter, and James had always assumed it was some stupid fashion statement and that it would clash with Severus all-black attire, but since spending more time with him James started to realise it was probably because the Slytherin just couldn’t afford one. He saw the green scarf when Christmas shopping with Asadora and it immediately made him think of the boy.

But Severus didn’t look happy. His hair was framing his face in soft waves and his eyes were downcast as his trembling hands clutched the three presents. He looked like he was about to cry and James felt all his joy evaporate. He, Remus and Sirius had gotten a dozen presents each...*is he upset because he only got three?*

“Sev-,” James started gently.

“Did you get me the scarf?” Severus interrupted hoarsely, not looking up from his lap.

“Yeah, I thought you’d like it-,” James said apologetically. Severus looked up at him, tears shining in his eyes alongside a little bit of panic. It broke the Gryffindor’s heart, “Sev, what’s wrong? I can go exchange it if-“

“No,” Severus said hurriedly, wiping at his eyes clumsily, cheeks flushing, “I-I just...I...,” he was stuttering, all anxious and endearing and clearly out of his depth, “I just never...got...um, Christmas presents b-before,” he finished awkwardly, “T-Thank you.”

James felt himself melting a little bit on the inside, “You’re welcome.”

"I didn't get you anything," Sev whispered, looking up at James in anxiety.

"No! No, that's alright!" James said quickly, "I wasn't really going to get you anything, but I saw the scarf and I just thought of you," he laughed and rubbed the back of his neck nervously, "it's not a big deal, really. Don't worry about it."

Severus bit his lip and nodded, sliding off the bed and padding over to his open suitcase, gently placing his presents among his rumpled clothes as if they were some sort of treasure. James watched his every move and a stupid, ridiculous thought entered his head as the Slytherin tucked a strand of his hair behind his ear. *He's mine*. It made James' stomach all weird and tense, as if a swarm of bees were just flying around in there.

"Actually," he got up from the bed before Severus could go downstairs, while they still had *some* privacy, "There is something you could give me. For Christmas."

Severus turned around and blinked at James in surprise, "What?"

James grinned devilishly, "A kiss."

Severus rolled his eyes and shook his head fondly, a little smile appearing on his face, "You're a walking cliché, Potter," he said but sauntered over anyway. He stood on his tiptoes, his cold, delicate hands coming up to hold James' cheeks. He closed his eyes and puckered his lips a little as he leaned up, pressing his mouth against James'.

It was a lovely feeling. James reached out to wrap his arms around Severus and pull him a little closer. They were both in their pyjamas, hair messy, and they hadn't brushed their teeth, but it was such a wonderful kiss. It was slow and warm and neither of the boys were rushing anywhere, just enjoying each other's presence, kissing languidly and lazily in the light falling from the window.

"BOYS! BREAKFAST!" James' mum's shout interrupted the moment and the two broke apart, giggling.

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In the evening, when everyone was downstairs in the living room, drinking mulled wine and laughing at childhood stories, Severus found himself upstairs in James' room. He sat on the bed and stared into space and thought *I will never be as happy as I was today*, over and over.

It was a depressing thought, but it was reality.

Waking up wrapped up in James' warmth followed by *actually* getting Christmas presents (and lovely ones too!), then breakfast with all the teenagers and children, was something Sev would never experience again. Even Black had been nice to him all day, which was a first and a pleasant surprise. The day was taken up with helping in the kitchen and taking care of the little ones and running out into the snowy back garden. Every opportunity he got James would drag Severus into a secluded corner and kiss him, or he'd hold his hand under the table, or send him one of his sweet smiles that made the Slytherin's heart race. Christmas dinner was delicious and once more Severus felt like part of the family – there were jokes thrown around and old stories and laughter seeped into the walls of the house and it was *perfect*. Hot chocolate and board games and a movie followed after the dinner, and then a walk into the snowy park, all together, a family. And now everyone was downstairs, drinking, the children tucked into bed, and Severus was up here, realising that he would never be this happy again.

They were returning to Hogwarts tomorrow evening, and from there...well who knew? The one

thing Severus was sure of was that James would lose interest in him soon enough. Maybe it was some weird fetish that made the Gryffindor temporarily attracted to the boy he once hated, some sort of power thing. It didn't matter because Sev knew the second James saw Lily he'd be back to trying to get her to be his girlfriend, Severus all forgotten. The best the Slytherin hoped for was that James would continue to be nice to him, and send him one of his wonderful smiles once in a while. Maybe that would be enough, it was more than Severus deserved.

And there was the matter of taking the Dark Mark. Severus turned over his arm to look at the pale skin of his wrist, brushing his fingertips over it. He imagined the moving tattoo there, a black skull ejecting a snake from its mouth, the same one Lucius had. The boy shuddered in disgust. He didn't want it, but at this point he wasn't sure he even had a choice. Here, in the Potter house, he felt safe. The walls were embedded with protective magic but out there in the world Severus would be an easy target for the Death eaters. If he didn't take the Mark after saying he would for so long he'd end up dead.

*The letter to Lily*, Severus suddenly remembered why he had even come up here in the first place. He sluggishly got up from the bed and walked over to the cupboard where James kept all his bits and bobs, spare paper and quills. He opened it up, rummaging through parchment of scribbles and drawings.

It was by chance really that a messily written letter tumbled from the pile. Severus would never intentionally read someone's personal correspondence, but the paper had *Dear Lily* written on top, and Sev moved before he even knew what he was doing, picking the parchment up.

It was from James. Severus could tell by the handwriting and he hated himself for even knowing that. His hands trembled as he greedily read the words as if they held the answer to the universe.

*Dear Lily.*

*How's your Christmas going? I hope you're having fun. I know we've only been apart for two days but I feel like I haven't seen you in ages. I miss you. I did it – I made friends with Snape, so now you have to go to the new year's ball with me. Can't wait to see you.*

*Lots of love,*

*James.*

Severus frowned and his heart stopped beating as a cold, distant feeling spread over him. His hands became still all of a sudden, and with perfect composure he read the words written in James' scrawly writing again.

*I miss you.*

*I made friends with Snape.*

*Now you have to go to the new year's ball with me.*

*Lots of love.*

*Lots of love.*

*Lots of love.*

*Love.*



Slowly, carefully, Severus returned the letter to its place, making sure none of the other papers had fallen out, and closed the cupboard door, as if he had never opened it in the first place. Slowly, as if in a trance, the boy walked out into the corridor and down the stairs. He could hear the family in the living room, erupting with laughter, but it sounded distant. The Slytherin found his coat in the dark and he pulled it on. He didn't bother with a scarf or gloves, shoving his feet into his tattered old shoes as he reached for the door and opened it. He stepped out into the freezing winter night quietly, closing the door behind him.

He started walking immediately, not knowing his destination, feet treading in the freshly fallen snow that glimmered gold in the light from the street lamps. Severus walked down the street calmly, detached from his feelings completely. It all changed the second he rounded a corner. Emotions hit him in the face like a punch, knocking the air out of him and forcing him to slump against the wall of the closest building, legs threatening to give out. He took in a rushed gulp of air and it came back out as a sob. There was something warm on Sev's face and in his crazy, confusing state he reached up and touched it, only to find that the warmth was tears. He was crying, breathing erratically, his whole body shaking.

James had done all this because he wanted to go to the ball with Lily – the girl probably forced him to be Severus friend, out of pity. It was a joke, a stupid game, and Severus had known that, deep down, and yet he chose to let his guard down and think that maybe some of the things the Gryffindor had said to him were even partially genuine. But no, he was a fool, he should've known better. Nobody loved him and nobody would – he was useless and worthless and he didn't belong in the company of James and Lily. The boy continued to cry, his face crumpled, tears running down his cheeks. Everything *hurt* so badly, he just wanted to collapse, to die and stop feeling all these horrible things.

Subconsciously the boy dug his fingers into his wrist. There was nothing left for him – he had to join the Dark Lord, it was the only thing he could do. Maybe there he would be accepted to some degree, or at least tolerated.

Through the blurry haze of his tears the boy slid down the wall and into the snow, not caring that the wetness seeped through his clothes. He pulled his knees up to his chest and buried his face in his arms, sobbing and crying and trying to get rid of that excruciating pain in his chest.

"Severus?"

The voice saying his name from somewhere above him, concerned, made Severus want to be sick. He wanted to stop crying but was unable to, "G-Go away," he sobbed.

"Hey, what's wrong?" the voice insisted, and a hand was placed on Sev's shoulder. The Slytherin's head snapped up in anger and he saw Asadora squatting next to him, her hat askew on top of her neon hair, expression worried, "I saw you leave."

Sev took a deep try and calm down. He wanted to be mad at Asa, to shout at her, but the girl had offered him nothing but kindness, and he didn't think she had been involved in this cruel plot, but her warm hand on Sev's shoulder made him just realise that she was just a joke, a bait, something dangled in front of him so he could have the illusion of family and belonging, before she would be snatched away.

"What's the m-matter with me?" Severus asked helplessly, voice shaky from crying. Asa's expression fell.

"Oh Sev, nothing's the matter with you. You're perfectly alright."

Sev shook his head desperately, “N-No I’m not. I-If I was then m-maybe he...he...,” he was unable to finish the sentence, dissolving into helpless crying once more, hugging himself. Asadora sat down next to him completely and wrapped an arm around his shoulders.

“Is this about James?” she asked gently.

And Severus just broke, and he told her everything in between desperate sobs – how James bullied him at school and how they hated each other, and then how he randomly started being nice to him and invited him over for Christmas. He told her about the fact that they kissed and he told her about Lily, and the letter he had found.

“...a-and I’m an absolute idiot,” Severus was finishing his story having calmed down a little though tears still stung his eyes and his heart still ached, “B-Because o-of course I fell for him a-and I thought...I-I thought that for some s-stupid, stupid r-reason maybe he felt t-the same b-because he acted like h-he did for a bit...,” he shook his head, “I w-was wrong. I should’ve k-known better. Of c-course he doesn’t love me.”

Asadora’s arm tightened around the boy’s shoulders, “I don’t know what my cousin’s playing at,” she said after a moment, quietly, “But I know he feels something for you. I’ve never seen him as happy as he is when he’s with you.”

“He’s pretending,” Severus said, sniffing, “You should see him with Lily.”

“Sev-,” Asa started with a frown. The boy shakily got to his feet. He had made a nuisance of himself – it didn’t matter if Asa had known or not, she would judge him anyway. Severus had to go back to Potter’s house and face him, Black and Lupin. They were an audience, and now Sev knew that they had come to jeer at him and witness James breaking his heart. He had to be ready for that.

“You can’t tell him any of this.”

“No!” Asadora jumped to her feet, “I have to! He needs to explain himself-“

“No,” Sev said sharply, wiping at his cheeks angrily, “He can’t know about any of this, about any of my feelings for him,” his voice softened when he saw Asa’s crestfallen expression and he tried to smile weakly, “I’ll be fine. It’ll just go back to normal, to the way it was.”

And without another word he started walking back towards the house, leaving his heart in the snow.

## In Front of the Fire



James tried not to be sad that Severus went to sleep early on Christmas night. Asadora had mentioned that the Slytherin didn't feel well and when James went upstairs to check up on him he was just a lump under the covers and the Gryffindor didn't want to disturb him so instead he sat downstairs with his family, a little down, feeling like he was missing something or someone. There was a feeling in his gut like something wasn't right but what would it be? Sev was upstairs, asleep in James' bed, the Gryffindor was surrounded by friends and family and tomorrow he would return to Hogwarts. Everything was fine.

When James, Remus and Sirius stumbled upstairs well past midnight, all three a little tipsy, James was excited to get into bed and cuddle Severus, however when he laid down behind the Slytherin and tried to wrap his arms around him, Sev just shrugged him off. James was a little disappointed but he just assumed the Slytherin was too warm or uncomfortable since they were all squished on the bed like sardines. He didn't really think much of it.

In the morning everything was messy and chaotic. Sirius couldn't find his wand and Remus couldn't close his bags and the children were crying, not wanting to say goodbye to the boys, and breakfast was being shoved in their mouths and things thrown around and they were almost late for the train and James barely had time to speak to Sev, even though he wanted to, more than anything. The Slytherin's eyes looked a little red and puffy and he looked a little sick and very, very sad for some reason but James wrote that down to the fact that they were leaving – he himself was sad too because he wouldn't see his family for a while. Goodbyes were emotional to say the least – Asadora kept hugging all four boys, threatening them into promising to write, Ernestina had permanently latched herself onto Remus' leg and refused to let go, James' mum fretted over him as if he were still a baby, while Giffard and Tabitha cried, their wails carrying through the house. The boys were shoved into Uncle Alistair's van and driven to King's Cross holding their shoes in their hands.

The four had to sprint through the platform and hopped onto the train minutes before it took off and then it took them ages to find a free carriage, and then all the other people coming back from Christmas break came to say hello and Sirius started playing exploding snap with Dirk Creswell and Peter found his friends and it was half an hour before James actually managed to sit down...and then he realised that Severus was gone.

"Where's Sev?" he asked, frowning as he looked around the carriage.

"What do you want Snape for?" Dirk asked, not looking up from the game he was playing with Sirius.

"Yeah," Peter looked at James curiously, "don't tell me you're friends now."

"They're not," Sirius snapped.

"Actually, we are," James said, glaring at his best friend, who rolled his eyes. Peter wrinkled his nose.

"With *Snivellus*?"

"Shut up, Wormtail," James growled. He was getting annoyed – he didn't need his friends being assholes right now. He didn't care what they thought but he wasn't in the mood for their annoying comments right now.

"He left a few minutes ago," Remus said kindly, smiling tiredly at James. He was the only one who seemed to understand, "He went left down the corridor, don't know where to though."

James smiled at him, "Thank you. I'm going to go find him."

He eagerly walked out of the carriage, feeling a little claustrophobic with most of his friends against him. The corridor was cold and quiet though muffled voices and laughter came from the carriages as the train rattled through the snowy train tracks. James walked, anxiously glancing into each carriage in hopes of finding the Slytherin but all he saw was groups of Slytherins and Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs and Ravensclaws and no Sev. He was starting to realise that they were running out of time to explain things to each other – James had messed up by not confessing his feelings to the boy when they were still in his house, because there they had privacy. Now James knew he wouldn't probably see Sev as much and they'd have to sneak around if they wanted to do anything...he wanted to see the boy and ensure that he knew about James' feelings, at least to an extent. He didn't want any miscommunication, he wanted Severus to know that James *wanted* him and to continue what they had.

He exhaled in relief when he found Severus in the last carriage of the train, one of the smaller ones, packed with extra suitcases and bags. The Slytherin was sitting by the window, looking at the dark winter night outside gloomily.

"There you are," James said happily, sliding the door open. Severus glanced at him and there was resentment in his dark eyes that surprised the Gryffindor. He looked *angry*.

"What do you want?" Sev asked coldly, turning back to the window. James blinked in surprise at his harsh tone and door closed behind him to give them some sort of privacy.

"Why did you leave the carriage?"

"Why would I stay?" Severus asked, "it's not like anyone wanted me there or anything."

"What?" James laughed, picking his way through the bags on the floor to stand in front of Severus. "Stop messing about," he said, reaching down to touch the boy's hair. Severus, fast as lightning, slapped James' hand away.

"Fuck off," he hissed.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" James was getting annoyed now, his hand stinging where the Slytherin hit him, "What did I do now?"

"Nothing, go back to your asshole friends," Severus growled. His attitude was seriously getting on James' nerves.

"Hey, there's no need to be rude, what's gotten into you?" he asked, "Is this about Sirius? He's

always a prick, just ignore him.”

“Listen,” Severus said sharply, suddenly, “We’re not friends. Christmas was nice but don’t presume to think that whatever we were doing is going to continue in Hogwarts.”

James’ stomach dropped, “What?” he asked faintly.

“We fucked,” Sev said icily, “and that’s that. I’m not interested in anything else.”

“What? No,” James said quickly, “I would never...you know I’m not like Malfoy, I was never...I don’t want-“

“Are you deaf? I said *I’m* not interested,” Severus interrupted rudely, “I don’t care what you want. You’re annoying me, fuck off.”

“*What?*” James asked, heart pounding, head spinning, “what even...”

“Just fuck off,” Severus seethed through his teeth, “prick.”

James’ jaw clenched. He wouldn’t put up with this. He didn’t have to. He had been nothing but kind to Severus so he didn’t understand why the Slytherin was hurting him like this, “Fine, fuck you too,” the Gryffindor said angrily, his immaturity and pride coming out as he walked out of the carriage, banging the door closed behind him. He was furious and had to hide in the bathroom and get a hold of himself before he returned to his carriage, so his friends didn’t see the state Severus got him in.

The Slytherin was obviously mad about something, but James would find him when they returned to the castle, and there they’d be able to have a conversation in private and James would be able to get Sev to listen to him, and he could finally tell him he loved him.

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Coming back to Hogwarts was wonderful. James hadn’t realised how much he missed the old castle and all his friends who he didn’t get to see over Christmas. He also missed Quidditch practice and *some* of his lessons, and honestly sleeping in his four poster bed among his friends was awesome.

But that evening that James returned to school and finally stopped cracking jokes with his best friends late into the night, when the lights got turned off and James pulled the curtains closed around himself, he felt lonely. And empty. And cold. He missed the warmth of a body against him and not just any body – he missed *Severus*.

He tossed and turned for half the night *aching* for the boy. They parted on bad terms and James didn’t have a chance to catch the Slytherin as they made their way to the castle from the train station in Hogsmeade. Now the space between them was physically tangible to the boy and it made him feel sick. He was in the Gryffindor tower and Sev was somewhere far, far below him in the Slytherin dungeons, and the worst thing was that James couldn’t just get up and go see him. The fact that the Slytherin was near Malfoy as well made him anxious. He didn’t think it would be like this, he didn’t think he would *need* Sev as much as he did.

Exhausted with trying, and failing, to fall asleep, James rose from his bed and brushed his curtains to the side, perching on the edge of his bed and looking out at the dark dorm room. The gothic windows let in blurry silver moonlight and snowflakes hit the frosted glass. James could hear wind howling through the castle. Peter was asleep in the last bed on the end, curtains pulled closed. The bed next to him that belonged to Sirius was empty and when James looked to his right he saw that

Remus was stretched out in his bed, peacefully asleep, Sirius in his dog form curled up against his chest, eyes closed. Seeing them like that confused James but he didn't question it, because he wanted his friends to be happy. Looking at them made him miss Severus though, so he got up and quietly left the dorm room.

The common room was empty save for one person. Lily was sitting by the fireplace which was slowly dying out. Her hair looked almost brown in the dim light and she was wrapped up in a blanket as she looked into the embers. James' heart jumped in his chest when he saw her and he almost chickened out and returned to bed. *No I have to see her, now's as good a time as any.*

"Hello," he said, grinning as he came to stand behind the armchair she was in. The girl flinched and looked at him wildly over her shoulder, before relaxing visibly and smiling.

"James," she exhaled, "I didn't see you there." The boy leaned over the armchair and pressed a kiss on top of her head. The girl's smile softened, "I tried to find you earlier. How was your Christmas?"

"It was good," James nodded, sliding into an armchair opposite the girl, "I...I uh, learned a lot of things about myself."

"Seems like it," Lily leaned her chin in her hand and cocked her head to the side.

James fought the urge to bite his lip in nerves, "How was yours?"

"Yeah, good," the girl smiled beautifully. James cleared his throat,

"You...uh...got my letter?"

Slowly, Lily nodded, "Yes. I must admit I was surprised. I didn't...when I asked you to be friends with Sev I didn't think you'd fall for him."

"Me neither," James exhaled, looking at the flames.

"You seem sad?" Lily asked softly. James shrugged.

"It's complicated...with him."

"Does he not feel the same?" the girl asked.

"No. Yes? I don't know," James sighed and rubbed his eyes. He had left his glasses upstairs, "he doesn't trust me, which I get, but one second he'll be all sweet and affectionate, and then he'll shout at me for no reason."

Lily smiled as if that pleased her, "That's Sev for you."

"You're not...angry," James said, looking at the girl, who looked weirdly content, "Or annoyed. Or sad. I thought you'd be mad at me."

Lily glanced at him with her vibrant green eyes, "I thought I wanted to be with you," she admitted, "I honestly did. But something was always missing, something I couldn't explain. Your letter, telling me your feelings for Sev, made so much sense. It's like everything clicked into place. All the years of you being a dick," James snorted at this, "mounted up to you repressing your feelings. It's almost too easy, but I'm happy. I'm happy you figured it out."

James nodded, lost in thought, "I just need him to figure it out now."

“Don’t worry,” Lily grinned, “I’m sure he’ll come around to trusting you soon. You’ve changed, James.”

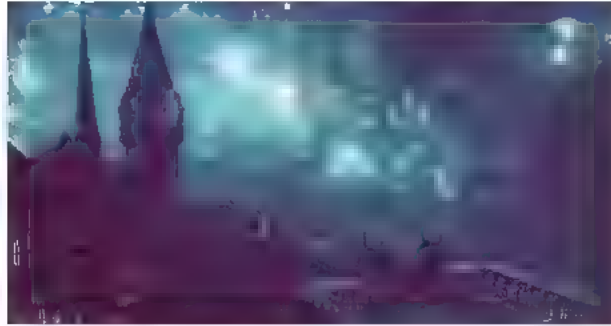
“So I’ve been told,” the boy winked at her playfully and Lily giggled, “But you’re still coming to the New Year’s ball with me, right?”

Lily frowned, “Surely you want to go with Severus.”

“Yes. I don’t think Severus wants to go with me though,” James said sadly.



## Found in the Bedsheets



James tied his shoes sluggishly, feeling like he didn't have the energy to straighten up from his position, so he stayed looking dully at his fancy dress shoes.

"You need to cheer up," Lily said above him, hands on her hips, "Sev doesn't like parties – him not coming tonight probably because he feels awkward, and not because he doesn't want to see you."

James sighed and stood up straight, towering over the girl. They were the only two Gryffindors still left in the common room, the New Year's Ball in full swing downstairs, "He's been avoiding me ever since we left my house."

Lily looked beautiful dressed in a pale-gold shimmery gown that trailed down to the floor. She claimed it was a 'champagne' colour but to James it just looked pale gold. Her fiery hair was pulled back into a bun on top of her head, a few strands curling around her face. She looked beautiful but looking at her made James feel nothing but pride; it was so weird because two months ago he thought he was in love with her.

"He hasn't," Lily said, "He's just...busy."

James exhaled, "Every time I try to find him or talk to him in the corridors he'll give me an excuse and disappear. He can't even *look* at me," he nibbled on his lip, "Maybe he just...maybe he meant what he said on the train--"

Lily raised her hand to silence him, "No. I know Severus. I think he's just pushing you away because he's scared of his feelings."

"I'm just going to have fun with you and the boys tonight," James said, offering Lily his arm and finding it in himself to smile, "and maybe Sev will be there," he added hopefully.

Lily smiled at him warmly and slid her hand through the crook of his arm, and having her close calmed James. He didn't know what he would do if Lily cut him off because of his feelings for Severus, but having the girl at his side right now made the Slytherin's rejection so much easier to bear. The two climbed through the portrait of the Fat Lady and she scorned them for being late since she herself was due for a painting party. Then together Lily and James descended the numerous staircases leading to the ground floor of the castle. They passed the occasional student or two, all in fancy dress, but almost everyone was in the Great Hall.

When James entered said hall, Lily on his arm, he couldn't help but grin. Lights were strung across the ceiling, criss-crossing overhead, baubles on wires, each containing a little firework, going off over and over. Snow fell from the gothic roof but it never touched the ground, where in the dim, multicoloured light students were jamming out to a hired band. Silver and black balloons floated through the air, bouncing off walls, and the ground was covered in a mist that swirled around

people's legs. Around the edges of the hall there were tables laden with food; salads, pastries, little cakes and cupcakes, cheese boards, canapés, breadsticks, plates of fruit, bowls of punch...it was all there.

"Let's go!" Lily giggled excitedly and pulled James into the dancing crowd, easily throwing her arms around his shoulders as she laughed freely. James couldn't keep the smile of his face either. He remembered when dancing with Lily filled him with romantic excitement but it dimmed when compared with the intensity that James felt around Severus. Still, it could always be like this – perfect, dancing with a beautiful girl. Except it wasn't perfect because despite how happy James was he still yearned for Severus, the one person who wasn't here. But James wasn't going to run to him like some lovesick puppy...not yet anyway.

He found Remus and Sirius and then Peter, and he drank with them. Naturally they spiked the punch because...well, they were the Marauders after all. James didn't want to get drunk though. He danced around for an hour, stuffed his face with the delicious food and generally tried to enjoy himself but as it got later and the seventh and eighth year students were getting sloppily shitfaced, he found himself more and more on edge. Severus was stuck in his mind the whole night and he just needed to see him – now was the best moment he would get since the other Slytherins were out here instead of in their common room. And, naturally, James had the invisibility cloak.

Spinning Lily into Sirius arms James found himself slipping away from the excited, drunk crowd and out into the hallway. He hadn't realised how warm it had been on the dance floor with his friends until the cool air of the stone hallways wrapped around him. He wanted, nothing more than to climb down to the dungeons right then, but he knew he needed to get his cloak first. Buzzing like an overeager child James made his way to the Gryffindor tower, skipping two steps at a time in his haste. However the Fat Lady had left her frame to go party with some headless knights down the corridor and it took James ten minutes to persuade her to come back and let him into the common room.

The fireplace was low and the lights were dim. A second year was asleep in an armchair, an open book in her lap. James crept past her as quietly as he could, ascending the stairs to his dorm. He would grab his invisibility cloak and go, and hopefully Sev would be in the Slytherin common room. James wouldn't know which dorm was his and he didn't want to go check each one, even with the cover of invisibility over him.

The dorm room was quiet and dark and all of the Marauders' shit was still strewn over the floor – Peter's shoes and Sirius' spare tie and Remus' shirts. Their baggage was still unopened even though they got back to the castle almost a week ago, the clothes pulled out of each one so it looked like an explosion had gone off. The curtains on three beds were shoved to the side, the covers unmade. The curtains on James' bed were drawn though.

He hadn't drawn them when he left to meet Lily in the common room.

James' heart jumped and he stopped mid-step to where the invisibility cloak was lying on the floor and he stared at the drawn curtains. Almost as if in slow motion his heart began to pound and his legs moved by themselves. Before he even knew what he was doing he found himself standing by his bed, shoving the curtains aside.

Severus was lying underneath the covers, hair mused, eyes red, clutching one of James' pillows to his chest. He jerked up when James pushed the curtains to the side and the Gryffindor saw that he was wearing one of James' school shirts, too big on him and pooling around his bare thighs.

"Severus," James whispered in surprise. Blood rushed to the Slytherin's cheeks.

“Y-You were meant t-to be at the ball,” he mumbled weakly.

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Severus was weak, he knew he was. First he told himself he would avoid James and even though he did, he still looked at him with longing at breakfast. Then he told himself he wouldn't go to the New Year's Ball, but...he did. He didn't dress up and in his tacky robes and hair in a bun at the nape of his neck and sneaked downstairs after everyone was already there, partying. Sev was sure he was the only person not at the ball but why would he go? He had no friends and he didn't try and fool himself into thinking that James would ever care for him now that Lily was back in the picture. But he still stood in the doorway for a few minutes, anxiously looking at the dancing crowd. He stayed until he saw Lily and James spinning in each other's arms. It made him sick to his stomach, and fucking heartbroken. A part of him had hoped the letter ordeal had been a misunderstanding but seeing them together...it all made sense. James was gorgeous. Lily was gorgeous. Severus wasn't and he had no place with either of them.

Afterward Sev wanted to just curl up in bed, but not in his one. After coming back from Christmas break his roommates did everything they could to antagonise him – they kept picking on him, taking his bed covers, pulling off his bed curtains, asking how good Potter's dick had been. It made Severus nervous to sleep in his own room so he wasn't even surprised when he found himself trailing up stairs like a ghost. He went up and up, lost in his misery, until he found himself in the Gryffindor tower, standing outside the painting that usually led into the common room. The Fat Lady was gone and Severus, standing in the shadows, silently cursed himself for even bothering to come here. He was going to leave when suddenly the painting opened and the last stranglers stumbled out, giggling.

On instinct Severus jerked forward and, unnoticed, slid through the gap of the closing door at the last moment. It was an automatic reaction, and Sev hadn't even meant to do it, but suddenly he found himself in the warm, red and gold Gryffindor common room. He was alone, thankfully, and he climbed up the first small staircase leading to a dorm. He didn't know what he was looking for, or what he even wanted. He was so lost in his depressing thoughts filled with James breaking his heart and the Death eaters that he lost himself in the monotonous action of opening dorm doors.

He found James' dorm on the third door. He knew that the boy lived there immediately – it was messy, smelled like him, and the covers on one of the beds were in the same colours as the ones in his house in Covent Garden, the one of the Quidditch team Sev didn't know. The boy heard voices behind him so he found himself closing the door and imprisoning himself in James' dorm room. He was hit by a sudden wall of sadness and tiredness and with dragging legs he slid to James' bed, his foot catching on one of the boys' shirts. Sev felt drunk when he sluggishly stripped down to his underwear and tugged the shirt over his head. He just wanted to be comforted by James' smell. He collapsed onto the covers, before climbing underneath them. It was cold and Sev yearned for James' warmth. When he closed his eyes he could pretend that James was there with him, holding him, loving him.

Sev had no idea how much time passed but as he was about to fall asleep he heard the door open in the distance, and then the curtains of the bed were being shoved open and James, in his lovely fancy robes, was staring down at Severus in shock.

“Sev?” he asked, sounding breathless, chasing away any of the sleepiness that the Slytherin was feeling and replacing it with shock and fear.

“Y-You were meant t-to be at the ball,” was Severus' stupid excuse.

Fast as lightning James' hand shot out and he grabbed Severus' arm, jerking him upwards so he

was kneeling on the bed, face almost pressed into James' neck. His heart stuttered and before he could say anything James leaned down and crashed their lips together. Sev let out a muffled moan but he was unable to move away because the Gryffindor wrapped an arm around his waist and dragged him closer. His kiss was hot and passionate and it knocked Severus' breath out of him.

"N-No," Severus got over the sudden pleasure assaulting him and making him dizzy in order to turn his face away, "No you don't get to do that--"

"You're still mad at me," James growled, hand tightening on Sev's arm, "even though you're in *my* bed."

"Shut up," the Slytherin whispered, cheeks flushing because he had no excuse to his presence here.

"Look at me," James snapped.

"Don't tell me what to do," Sev growled.

James grasped Sev's chin in his hand and forced the boy to meet his eyes with a rough jerk, "What did I do?" he demanded, "You've been avoiding me for days," when Sev averted his eyes the Gryffindor seemed to get more annoyed, "Do you know how you're making me feel? I don't know what's going on and you're hurting me through your actions, and through what you told me in the train--"

"I saw your letter to Lily," Severus blurted, just wanting James to shut up.

James blinked, "What? Which one?"

"I miss you," Severus quoted in a snarl, "Can't wait to see you. Lots of love, James."

He saw the Gryffindor's expression crumble, reinforcing the painful idea that there was something between him and Lily, "I...that letter wasn't anything."

"Oh shut up," Severus pulled his arm from James' grasp.

"I'm serious!" the anger was gone from James' voice, replaced by what sounded like desperation, "I sent it because I didn't want to confess to her what I feel for you!"

"Oh yeah?" Sev climbed off the bed, putting it between him and James as he whirled on him, "And what *do* you feel for me?" The Gryffindor opened and closed his mouth like a fish, but nothing came out. Severus' stomach twisted in pain, "Yeah," he said faintly, "Thought so." He turned to the door and left and James didn't stop him. Or maybe he just didn't have time.

## A Ruined Shirt



Severus was two flights of the stairs down, well on his way to the Slytherin common room, when he realised he should've never left the Gryffindor tower. Through his heartbreak and a blur of tears he had forgotten that he was wearing nothing but his underwear and James' shirt, only realising when he stopped to catch a breath and fight back a sob. Sev felt exposed and disgusting. How could he be so pathetic and let James know his true feelings? And how did he end up in this situation where anyone could walk past and pick on him and his nakedness.

Ashamed and upset Severus stuck to the shadows of the castle as he hurried to the dungeons, eager to get into his bed and forget the whole ordeal. Thankfully most students were still going wild in the Great Hall and those who weren't littered the hallways like vermin, either too drunk or too busy making out to give Severus any attention, for which the boy was glad for. Somehow he managed to get to his common room uninterrupted, stuttering out the password and clambering in clumsily, almost tripping over his own two feet.

"I knew it wouldn't be long," Lucius cold voice rang through Severus' muddled brain and his hand wrapped around his arm like a spider. The Malfoy jerked him around roughly, slipping from the shadows, furious. The common room was dark and empty and Lucius was like a predator waiting to pounce. He didn't have to wait anymore, his prey was here, "Going off to Potter's tower like some cheap whore. He fucked you and kicked you out, didn't he?"

His face was pale, twisted in rage, and he looked like some demon, "L-Let go," Sev's voice trembled and he tried to get free. Lucius' fingers tightened painfully on his arm.

"Are you some kind of slut now?" Lucius demanded with a chilly laugh, looking up and down Severus half-naked body with distaste, making the Slytherin want to die from shame, "What am I saying, you were always a slut, that's why you let me fuck you. I just didn't think you would stoop so low as to have *Potter* do it--"

"Shut up," Severus growled though fresh tears sprang to his eyes, "He didn't fuck me--"

"Be quiet," Lucius seethed and, fast as lightning he whirled Severus around and threw him against a wall painfully. The boy bit his lip to muffle a groan of pain and seconds later Lucius was turning him around, a hand on the back of his head shoving his face into the wall, the fingers of his free hand digging into the younger boy's hip.

Cold dread trickled into Sev's stomach as he realised what this was. The uncomfortable weight of Lucius' body pressed against his back, claustrophobically trapping him against the wall, made Severus want to be sick. He couldn't do this again.

"No," he told Lucius, reaching back to shove him away. The Malfoy grabbed his arm and twisted it violently behind his back, making Severus cry out as a shot of pain went through him again.

"You're nothing," Lucius seethed, "you're my fucktoy and I'm not going to share you with *Potter*."

Severus had three options – either be sick right there and there, let Lucius have his way with him and just bear it, or finally do something about this disgusting situation he had gotten himself into. As Lucius gripped the hem of James' shirt that Sev was wearing, the boy reached into the pocket at his chest, and pulled out his wand.

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It took James all of furious five minutes to realise his horrible, horrible mistake.

*"Fuck,"* he picked himself up off his bed, where he had collapsed to brood in the conflicting emotions he was drowning in. He had been so busy being mad at Severus and himself that he had completely not realised that the Slytherin had left the Gryffindor tower, alone, dressed in nothing but some underwear and James' shirt.

The Gryffindor scrambled off his bed and picked up his invisibility cloak. As he shoved it in his pocket of his fancy dress robe the second realisation hit him – he hadn't seen Malfoy at the ball downstairs. All the other Slytherins were there but not the blonde, who would've been hard to miss. A feeling of dread settled in James' gut and he had a feeling something very, very bad was going to happen and so he practically flew out of the dormitory. The ball was slowly coming to an end and James just managed to avoid the crowd spilling from the Great Hall on his way to the Slytherin dungeons. He could hear their voices following him down the hallways, bouncing around corners, excited and drunk, and James broke into a run.

He made it down to the dark, damp dungeons and came to a stop in front of the bare stone wall. He looked at it hopelessly and gritted his teeth. He didn't know the fucking password, *"Fuck,"* he swore again, and punched the wall in frustration, though he didn't feel any pain through his haze of anger and fear, *"I need to see him,"* he whispered helplessly, pressing his forehead against the rough bricks.

As if they could understand, the bricks shifted, and a door appeared in the wall. Shocked, James stumbled back, but wasted no time as he shoved said door open, heart pounding. Something inside him was pulling him insistently, and he reached for his wand before he even knew what he was doing, spilling into the dark common room.

In the dim illumination from little green lights around the chamber James saw Malfoy, his jaw clenched, eyes furious, and opposite him Severus, messy and dishevelled, the shirt he had taken from James missing the top few buttons. His arm was extended as he pointed his wand at Lucius and he seemed determined.

Both their heads snapped up when James entered, and Severus' whole body jerked.

*"Potter,"* Malfoy spat in disgust, eyes burning with hate.

The rational part of James' brain told him that he wasn't needed – clearly Severus had the situation under control. But seeing Malfoy right now, and the state that Sev was in, spoke for itself and James saw red. He shoved his wand back into his pocket and hurled himself at Malfoy without a second thought. Fuck magic, fuck everything, James drove the blonde into a wall and punched him in the face with no hesitation, and blood spurted from the blonde's nose. He was vaguely aware of Sev screaming at him to stop, but he wasn't listening. It felt good to physically hurt this piece of shit that had caused so much damage to Severus. Between Malfoy and James it was hard to believe that Severus hadn't completely broken down, but James was ready to make up for his wrongs.

Starting by killing Malfoy.



"Enough!" Severus was suddenly right next to James, clinging onto his arm. A mist had descended onto the Gryffindor's eyes so he hadn't realised what he was doing – Malfoy was almost unconscious, head rolling freely on his shoulders, lips and nose bleeding. He was alright, just a bit banged up, "Stop it," Sev hissed, and although his tone was angry his eyes were looking at James pleadingly.

The Gryffindor turned to Sev and let go of Malfoy who stumbled before somehow managing to regain his balance, "You piece of-," he started but Severus held up his wand and pointed it at his face, not looking away from James.

"Don't make me crucio you," he growled.

Malfoy snorted, "Like you'd dare. You'd get expelled."

Severus' head snapped to look at him, "Not if it was in self defence," he growled softly under his breath. For a second he didn't look vulnerable and a shiver went through James just looking at his dark, angry demeanour.

Malfoy's jaw tensed and he glared at the two but the voices of fast approaching Slytherins prompted him to turn and wobble to his dorm room, cursing under his breath and clutching his nose. Severus remained tense, gripping his wand.

"We need to go," James said softly and, not waiting for protest from the other boy, pulled the invisibility cloak from his pocket and threw it over both of them, just in time for students to start filtering into the common room.

Severus glared at James under the cloak but the Gryffindor simply reached down and grabbed his hand, twining their fingers and tugging him to the door, manoeuvring around the drunk Slytherins to get out into the corridor. They didn't speak as James pulled Sev up staircases and down hallways, up to the Gryffindor tower, invisible to the rowdy crowds of students.

They got into the Gryffindor common room alongside a dozen other students and immediately James got them up the stairs and into his dorm room, driven by some kind of primal urge to protect Sev. The Marauders were back in the room and although Severus froze, James didn't care. With a swift movement he whipped the invisibility cloak off of them.

"What the-," Sirius jerked to his feet, stopping mid-word to Peter, whose eyes widened. Remus looked worried at the sudden appearance of the two boys.

"Are you...what happened?" he asked, also standing up and hurrying over to James.

The Gryffindor knew the two of them looked a mess. James was furious, his knuckles stained with Malfoy's blood, his hair mused. Severus was half-naked, the shirt hanging off of one of his shoulders, and he looked like he was about to start crying. They were still holding hands. James' head was all over the place and he didn't know what to do, except he knew he didn't want to answer any questions and that Severus was his priority.

Sirius surprised him, "Right," he said, clapping his hands, "Let's all get out and give them two some peace."

"What-," Peter protested but Remus grabbed his jumper and jerked him to his feet and in a blink the three were gone, Sirius casting a quick silencing spell as they went, Remus closing the door behind them.

James and Severus were left alone in the dark dormroom, the only light coming from the moon that



filtered in through the snow encrusted window. James felt his rage evaporate instantly as he was surrounded by calmness and stillness. Slowly he turned around to face the other boy. Sev was shaking, one of his thin, pale shoulders peeking up from the ruined shirt. His breathing seemed shallow and his eyes were downcast, hair tumbling down around his face as if he were trying to hide his expression.

"Severus," James murmured, reaching out to the Slytherin.

"Don't touch me," the boy flinched away from his touch. James got a horrible flashback to the time before Christmas when he had caught Malfoy trying to fuck Sev, and the Slytherin had flinched away from him as well. He backed up until his back hit the wall, and then he just broke down crying. He buried his face in his hands and started sobbing – full body sobs that wracked his whole frame. He sounded so heartbroken and looked so tiny and helpless, like a little push could break him into tiny pieces, and James couldn't help but think *I should've protected him*.

He didn't know whether he should keep his distance or ignore Severus' request and forcefully hug him against his will. He hadn't ever seen Severus cry, except for that time outside the club, and it made the Gryffindor wonder how many times Sev had cried in private because of how badly James had bullied him.

"Do you want me to go?" he asked softly, and Severus just cried harder, "I'll go if you don't want me here–"

"S-Shut up," Severus sobbed, tears dripping down his face. His cheeks were stained red, eyes puffy, and he looked like he was on the verge of a mental breakdown, unable to keep himself together. His breathing was shallow, his eyes unfocused, and his fingers gripped his hair so hard that James was scared he'd rip it out.

"You can come sit on the bed if you want," James said softly, and then he himself backed up and sat on his bed, pulling the curtains closed on three sides, leaving one open. It took all of his strength to stay there and be patient since he could hear Severus sobbing softly and wanted nothing more than to comfort him. However in less than a minute the desperate sobs subsided, giving way to quieter ones, mixed with sniffles, and Severus padded over to the bed.

He didn't meet James' eyes as he closed the last curtain around them. He hovered by James for a second, and then his face crumpled and he collapsed sideways into the Gryffindor's lap. He was so thin that the impact was nothing and immediately James wrapped his arms around the cold, shivering boy as he started crying again, clinging onto James' shirt.

"Shhh, you're okay," James whispered, leaning his cheek against Severus' forehead before kissing him, "He won't touch you again. I've got you, baby."

"D-Don't call me that," Severus voice was muffled as he pressed his face into James' shoulder, "A-And don't l-lie to my anymore."

James cradled him in his arms like the precious thing he was and he just wanted to make him alright, "I'm not, I promise. That letter didn't mean anything. I don't love Lily."

Severus didn't say anything, just pressed himself closer into James' chest, his sobs subsiding once more. The Gryffindor pulled the covers from underneath himself and carefully wrapped them around the boy in his arms, so only his head poked out. He stroked the Slytherin's hair until he calmed down completely, melting into James.

"I'm going to become a Death eater," Sev said suddenly, emotionlessly. James tensed and his arms

tightened around the Slytherin.

"No, you're not," he said, trying to keep calm.

"There's nothing else I can do. Everyone in Hogwarts hates me, I'm always going to be alone. I made promises that I can't break now and joining...joining *him* is the only thing left for me."

He hadn't moved from James' arms, which gave the Gryffindor hope. He had to say it now or never. Slowly he leaned down and kissed the top of Sev's head, "I'm in love with you."

Severus slid out of his arms, dropping the covers onto the bed unenthusiastically as he stood up, "I told you to stop lying," he mumbled, and he was so dejected and lifeless and exhausted that it scared James, "You're saying stupid Gryffindor things to get me to not join them."

"I'm saying it because I mean it," James' heart physically hurt in his chest and his hand shot out to grip Sev's, "I'm in love with you. Merlin knows I didn't mean for it to end up here but it did and I..." the Slytherin's eyes welled with tears again and James' heart broke, all over again, "*Sev*," he whispered helplessly, also standing up. Severus sniffled and wiped his eyes with the sleeve of James' ruined shirt.

The Gryffindor wrapped his arms around the boy from behind and buried his face in the space between his neck and shoulder. Sev, after a moment, wrapped his arms over James' and let him hold him. They stayed like that for a moment, and James savoured every second that the Slytherin was in his arms, safe and whole. Then James turned him around carefully, and lowered him onto the bed, covering his body with his own.

Severus didn't protest, looking up at James with puffy eyes and flushed cheeks and he looked like a mess, but in the best way, and James just wanted to keep him *safe* and he was so in love with him that it physically hurt.

When Sev pulled him down for a kiss it was nowhere close enough to expressing all the turbulent, intense emotions James felt for him but at least it was something so he allowed himself to mould into the boy, and kiss him, languidly and passionately, as if they had an eternity together. Despite how upset James was, having Severus so close and in a state of part undress still aroused him and he felt heat pooling in his stomach just from kissing the boy. It was snowing outside again, but nothing seemed to exist except James' bed and the four curtains surrounding it.

Severus didn't protest when James undid the few remaining buttons on his shirt, allowing it to slip off his shoulders and pool around his elbows. He seemed to kiss the Gryffindor harder though, arms coming up to wrap around James' shoulders, as if he was scared that the boy would leave. But James didn't go anywhere. They kissed and kissed, for what seemed like ages, until James' head was spinning and he didn't know where he ended and Sev started.

Their fingers trailed over each other's bodies, their breaths came out fast into each other's mouths. James' hand found itself between Severus' legs and then lower, and then he himself stripped down completely. The room was chilly but the air around the two boys was hot, almost feverish, the only sounds were the ones of their harsh breaths, spells whispered softly, and Severus' muffled cry when James slid into him. The Gryffindor didn't let him turn around, insisting they faced each other. He wanted to see Severus, *properly* see him. And he could now.

"You okay?" James asked in a whisper, even though he didn't have to since they were alone in the room. Severus, whose brows were furrowed and hands twisted in the sheets on either side of his head, nodded.

"Y-Yeah. You can move if y-you want," he said, voice still carrying a trace of tears. James smiled down at him and kissed him quickly. The Slytherin's legs were wrapped tightly around his waist, his thighs warm, and seeing him laid out beneath him made James happy.

He started to thrust into the boy gently and Severus averted his gaze, biting his lip and trying to hold himself together. Even now he was trying to hold back. James leaned down and kissed the warm skin of his neck as he buried his cock in the boy, over and over. It was hot and slow and drawn out and perfect and James started falling apart sooner than he would've liked, his hands holding Sev's hips gently.

The Slytherin let out a quiet whimper, and then a breathless moan, his self-control clearly deteriorating. His face was red, eyes half lidded, lips swollen. He was everything James wanted. The Gryffindor pulled back, his thrusts getting faster ever so slightly.

"H-Hey," he gasped out, "Look at me."

Shyly Severus' dark eyes met his and the boy's lips parted so he could let out a needy, quiet moan, "G-Go faster."

"No," James whispered, "We're going slow tonight."

Severus let out another stuttered moan, "F-Fuck you're k-killing me."

James grinned but kept his fucking slow, making sure his member slid in as far as possible into Severus. He wanted him to forget every single time Malfoy had ever touched him, "I know you hate it when I say this but you're amazing," he murmured, stroking Sev's stomach gently.

Sev didn't say anything, turning his face to the side and closing his eyes, breaths punctuated by moans ever so often. It went on like that for a while, James thrusting into Severus slowly and searching his face, until it started to become too much.

"James," Severus whined sweetly, face scrunched up in pleasure. His cock was pale and hard against his stomach, leaking precum everywhere. James would've licked it off if he wasn't too busy trying to keep his orgasm at bay, "Oh my God," Severus sobbed after a particularly hard thrust by the Gryffindor, "I-I can't...I-I can't, James, I-I'm gonna-"

"Shh, it's okay baby," James murmured, sweat beading on his forehead, muscles aching in the best way. He could feel his orgasm mounting up and knew he was seconds away from exploding.

But it was Sev who came first, untouched, painting himself with cum, letting out the most arousing moan James has ever heard. The Gryffindor followed soon after, as soon as the Slytherin's passage clenched around his member, tumbling over the edge.

A cleaning charm and few minutes later the boys were snuggled underneath James' covers, content, sleepy and happy. James was sure he would never let Sev out of his arms, not when the boy felt so perfect against him.

"Are you going to say it back?" he asked tiredly, forehead pressed against Severus, unable to stay apart. Sev's eyes were closed.

"Say what?" he whispered.

"That you love me too," James said, cradling his face, "Because I love you. So, so much."

"I don't believe you," Severus said, and yet he pressed himself closer against James and clung onto

him like he couldn't bear to let go and it was all the Gryffindor could hope for. He was happy and if it took time for the Slytherin to trust and believe him then he could wait.

He fell asleep with that thought and when in the morning he woke up with Sev still in his arms, he counted it as a win. It was early but James untangled their limbs and pushed the curtains aside, finding the beds of the other Marauders still empty. Upon some investigation he found them in the common room, Sirius and Remus laying side by side on a couch and Peter curled up in an armchair. It was a heart-warming sight.

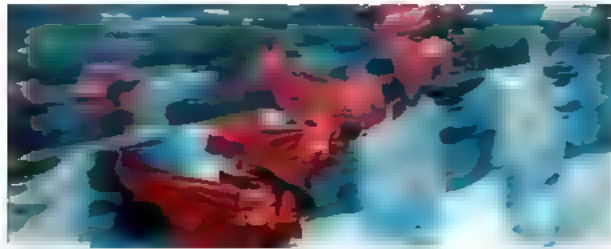
When James came back into the room he found Severus awake and looking at him tiredly. James grinned at him, deciding he could wake up to that every morning, "Hey beautiful."

Severus gave him the most gorgeous, sleepy smile, but then grew serious, "I'm not going to become one."

"Become what?" James asked, sliding back into the warm bed.

"A Deatheater."

## The Boy Who Lived



It was windy in the second week of January as Severus approached the Quidditch pitch, wrapped up in one of his old jackets, chin shoved into his chest to try and keep out of the piercing cold. There were snowy patches all around the field but nothing major which was why the first Quidditch match of the year was progressing today between Gryffindor and Hufflepuff.

Severus felt like a shadow as he trailed behind the eager crowds walking to the pitch, all of them dressed in the colours of the team they were supporting, even if it wasn't their House team. Sev didn't speak to anyone and they all ignored him which he appreciated – even the weird looks and whispers about him and James had almost stopped by now. Still, he wished Lily was here so he didn't have to walk alone. They were meant to go to the game together but the girl had gotten sick a few days ago and opted to stay in bed with a book, which meant that Severus was stuck here by himself. Not that he minded too much. He became anonymous in the crowd filtering into the stadium and climbing up the benches to sit in clumps, waving flags and laughing among themselves.

Sev's eyes landed on Remus and Peter, who were near the top of the Gryffindor stand among a hoard of their over-excited housemates. Earlier they had invited him to come sit with them but now the thought of pushing through the crowd to get up there made Severus sick so instead he collapsed onto the closest bench and sat alone, anxious and cold until the match began.

Severus didn't know much about Quidditch – he wasn't a sports person, but he couldn't help a flutter of excitement that went through him every time the Gryffindors scored, mostly because James was on the team. Watching him zoom through the air, all red and gold and fierce, was breathtaking and Sev couldn't help thinking *wow he's mine*. It was still an unfamiliar thought that made him fidget but he was getting more used to it each day. He anticipated the moment the match would end so he could see James properly.

However the moment Gryffindor won the game everything exploded. People rushed down from the benches and onto the pitch, screaming and cheering, tossing the players in the air with excitement. The sudden chaos made Severus nervous and so he stuck to the edge of the crowd, unable to get over his nerves and approach James, who was lost somewhere among the people.

"Gryffindor! Gryffindor! Gryffindor!" the crowd chanted.

Severus stepped away and opted to go back to the Slytherin dungeon and find James to congratulate him later. However just as he turned a hand shot out of the mass of students and grabbed Sev's wrist and seconds later James shoved his way out.

"Hey!" he called with a grin.

He was sweaty and breathless, his dark hair wet from the soft rain, stuck to his forehead. He had shoved his glasses on, his cheeks still flushed from the match. He had given his broom to someone but was still wearing his Quidditch uniform which, quite frankly, made him look really, really hot.

"Hey," Severus said back, softer, the air in front of his face turning into a little cloud. The crowd was now busy tossing an exhilarated Sirius into the air. James smiled and tugged Severus closer, wrapping his arms loosely around the Slytherin's waist.

"You actually came," he said, looking like he couldn't contain his happiness. *I am the cause of that happiness*, Severus thought distractedly.

"Of course I came," he grumbled, "I was hoping you'd lose."

James rolled his eyes, "Merlin, always so sarcastic. I love it," before Sev could react he leaned down and kissed him, right there, in front of everyone.

Everything in Sev's head went quiet for a split second, and he tensed. James pulled back and Severus looked around, paranoid. Nobody was glaring at him, nobody looked disgusted. A few people had glanced over and a couple of girls were squealing a few feet off, but that was about it. Still, Severus blushed.

"Well done on the game," he mumbled, looking at his shoes.

"Thanks," James' smiled widened and he quickly pecked Sev again, "We're having a party to celebrate in the Gryffindor tower. You coming?"

"I...uh," Severus bit his lip, "No. I think I'll pass."

James pouted, "Aw, c'mon. Please come, even just for a little bit. For me, *please?*"

"Fine," Sev rolled his eyes and James pecked him again before he was dragged off by his team captain. Warmth spread in Severus' gut and feeling really fucking happy he turned to go back to the castle and change out of his damp clothes before the party.

"Oi Snape wait up!" a voice called, making the boy stop in his tracks. He turned around slowly and saw Black jogging over to catch up with him, sweaty and caked with mud from the game. Sev tensed – although he and the other boy were civil it wasn't as if they were friends.

"Uh...good game," Severus blurted when Black stopped next to him.

"I know right," he sent him a charismatic grin, almost as if they were friends, and then fished something out of his pocket, "Lily gave this to me, she just found it the other day in a bunch of her shit," he held out an open envelope to Sev, "Sorry 'bout the mud on it."

"Don't worry about it," Severus hesitated for a second before taking the envelope. Black gave him a half-arsed wave.

"I'll see you at the party, Snape," he said, borderline warmly, and ran off to join his team. Sev was left alone in this part of the field, turning the envelope in his hands over slowly. There was a letter inside and with shaky hands Sev slid it out. He had no idea why Black would give him this when Lily could've done it herself...if she wasn't in bed all day.

*Stop being such a coward and just read it*, Severus told himself, unfolding the paper and hoping it wasn't a letter from Lily telling him to give up on James because she still loved him. His heart started pounding as his eyes greedily read the words on the paper.

*Dear Lily.*

*How's your Christmas going? I hope you're having fun. I know we've only been apart for 2 days but I feel like I need to speak to you. It's about Snape. I think i have feelings for him and that's your fault. If it wasn't for your stupid idea of us becoming friends then this would've never happened, and now im following around a boy that hates me. i hope you don't hate me for this too but i cant continue pretending that i have feelings for you when all i can think about is him.*

*~~I think i might be in love with him.~~*

*i hope we can still be best friends and that you can help me with this.*

*Lots of love,*

*James.*

At the bottom was a note scribbled from Lily.

*James sent me this letter a few days into Christmas break. Sorry, I couldn't find it before today. Hope this makes you realise that he really does love you.*

Severus' legs were trembling, as were his hands. He stared at the paper, heart pounding painfully. *All I can think about is him.* Severus bit his lip as around him it started to get darker and people were quickly leaving the field. Sev needed to see James really, really badly.

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James was two drinks in and he was having a great time with his friends in the common room. Lily was on his one side, Remus on the other, all three cheering Sirius on as he tried to out-drink some Slytherin. James kept glancing at the clock on the wall and he eagerly awaited Severus' arrival.

"Prongs," a tipsy Peter popped up at James' elbow, "Snape's upstairs. He's asking for you."

"Why didn't he just come here?" James asked, having to shout over the loud music blaring through the common room. In response the chubby boy shrugged his shoulders.

James didn't bother waiting around, eager to see his almost-kind-boyfriend so he weaved his way through the crowd and up the short staircase to his dorm room. He shoved the door open, and saw that the night-lamp was on, flooding the room in a warm, golden light. Before James could notice anything else there were hands pushing him back against the door, forcing it closed.

"What the-," James started.

Severus crashed his lips against the Gryffindor's, his hands twisting into his shirt. It took James a sluggish second to catch up with what was happening, but when he did he allowed his eyes to slide shut and he opened his mouth so his tongue could battle Sev's. His hands gripped the boy's hips and they kissed passionately and heatedly, though James had no idea where this sudden intensity was coming from.

Severus' arms slid around his neck, he stood on his tiptoes so he could be closer to the Gryffindor. James lost himself in his heat and the firmness of the body against him. He pulled back after long minutes of almost violent, passionate kissing.

"Hello to you too," James said, amused and aroused and out of breath.



"I love you," Severus blurted. James' heart jumped in his chest.

"Huh?"

"I love you," for once Sev wasn't looking away, his dark eyes piercing James', "I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you *James*."

"Fuck," James whispered, pressing their foreheads together, "Shit. Yeah. Oh Merlin, okay. Yeah. I love you too."

"I saw the letter," Sev said quietly, "From Lily. Black gave it to me."

James smiled, "I told you I wasn't lying," he murmured, and he thought he might actually be of happiness in that moment.

#### **4 Years Later**

"Can't believe he's actually gone," Severus mumbled, sitting at the kitchen table, hands wrapped around a mug of tea. James came out of the kitchen with his own mug and placed it on the table next to Sev's. He frowned. The past couple of years he had grown even taller and now a dark stubble shadowed his jaw, but he looked every bit like the charismatic boy Sev had fallen in love with.

"Are you alright?" he asked now, walking over to his boyfriend and placing a hand on his cheek. Sev cocked his head up to look at the other man.

"I...", he licked his lower lip nervously, "Yes. I suppose. Just...knowing that we can take the shielding and safety charms off the house--"

"We can't," James said firmly as Sev stood up and padded to the window, looking out at the London streets outside. He was clearly agitated. Despite the fact that Halloween was last night the decorations were still up on the houses outside, "Voldemort might be gone but his followers are still around."

Sev winced, "Don't say his name."

James walked over to him again, "What's wrong?" he murmured, reaching out and cradling Severus' cheek in his hand once more. The boy leaned into the touch, "I thought you'd be happy with that monster gone. In a few months the Death Eaters will disband and you'll be perfectly safe."

"I know I just...", Sev sighed and turned to face James. His hair had grown even longer since his Hogwarts days and was now in a bun on top of his head, a few strands escaping to frame his face. He had gained a little weight as well, so he didn't look sickly anymore, he looked softer, happier, "I keep thinking about that poor boy's family."

"The Longbottoms?" James asked, and gently pulled Severus into his arms, "I know. It's horrible. How did that little Neville destroy the Dark Lord all by himself? It's insane."

Severus sighed, "I don't know," he rested his forehead against James' chest, "Let's not talk about it anymore."

"You know it's like our fourth anniversary today," James said gently. Severus frowned and looked up.

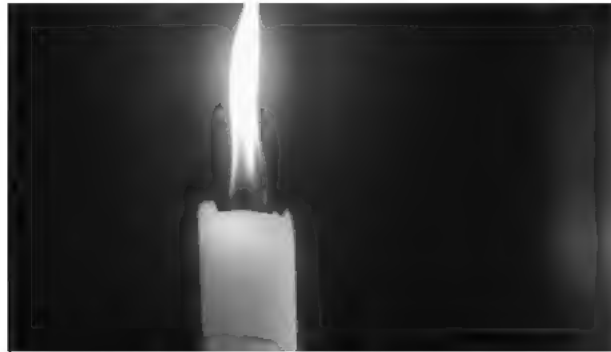
"No it's not," he said, "We started dating in January."

“Yeah, January fourth. But right around now we started getting close,” James murmured, brushing his hair from Sev’s face, “Merlin knows it was the best decision I’ve ever made.”

Severus smiled and stood on his tiptoes to peck James’ lips, “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

*~Fin.*



**James really wants to go to the New Year's ball with Lily, but she has one condition - James has to befriend her best friend and his archenemy, Snape. The Gryffindor sets out on this daring quest of being nice to the Slytherin, and accidentally learns things he never thought he would about the boy and his past. Suddenly James finds himself with a lot of complicated feelings that could ruin everything he thinks he has with Lily. Maybe he doesn't want to go to the ball with her after all...**

